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**OIL, STATE-CAPITAL and LABOUR:**

**work and work relations in the Nigerian  
National Petroleum Corporation.**

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**Submitted for the degree of Ph.D**

**University of Warwick  
School of Industrial and Business Studies**

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(ii)

**DEDICATION.**

**For Grandma**

**C. Bukunola Kukoyi**

**(In Memoriam: Feb. 1912-12 July 1987)  
who was everything to me.**

**To**

**G.P., Numa, Douglass, P.I.,  
Efe and others, whose collective  
labour fuels the nation,**

**in anticipation of a just and more  
dignifying motherland.**

(iii)

**CAPTION.**

If knowledge is power, we must demonstrate  
that it can be a power not only to dominate but  
also to emancipate.

-Richard Hyman-

**...this misty (bermuda) morning...**

Soft billows of cotton vapour,  
..shrouding turrets, tanks and columns,  
in misty wraps of cloudy harmattan  
morning, bringing the sacred vapoured  
head of Kilimanjaro, ...a mere ..fifty meters  
away.....

.... amidst the whistling vent lines and  
the rumbles of speeding crude,  
among shimmering turbines and  
screaming compressors... sweat and tears,  
..blood and lives,...are  
squeezed into products refined....

sight shortened to two dozen and one  
meters; the rest in soft, stagnant billow  
of mist.....  
and men in hastened walk of ceaseless  
ants, hurry to man their posts; Here comes  
the new Shift draped in the fog,  
..... this their bermuda!

Not even the Devil's Torch\* is visible  
..hidden in the chilly dense  
hands of the northwestern wind...  
.....this their bermuda!

steam twilling into mist,  
..sweat into blood...  
..swinging arms and burning biceps  
slurred voices and drowsy eyes...  
....druggard brains and  
drained spirits...  
....hurried shuffles of the  
changing Shift...  
in the stagnant bermuda of this  
misty morning...  
... this their bermuda  
... so beautiful... so ugly!.

Jimi  
(Original Draft; Warri Refinery,  
0708hrs, 3 December, 1985)

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\* This is the name the Refinery workers call the flare column for waste gas.

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### Glossary of Abbreviations.

ABTEAWU:	Automobile, Boatyard, Transport Equipment and Allied Workers' Union of Nigeria.
AFRC:	Armed Forces Ruling Council.
AG:	Action Group.
AGM:	Assistant General Manager.
AGS:	Assistant General Secretary.
ASUU:	Academic Staff Union of (Nigerian) Universities.
ATU:	Administrator of Trade Unions.
BYM:	Borno Youth Movement.
CBN:	Central Bank of Nigeria.
CGS:	Chief of General Staff (Head of GSHQ)
CIC:	Capital Issues Commission.
CRs:	Control Room(s).
CS(SHQ):	Chief of Staff (Supreme Headquarters)
CWC:	Central Working Committee. (NUPENG).
DGS:	Deputy General Secretary.
ERID:	Economic Research and Intelligence Department.
FAD:	Finance and Accounts Division.
FEM:	Foreign Exchange Market.
FMELP:	Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (Ministry of Labour).
FMMP:	Federal Ministry of Mines and Power.
FMPE:	Federal Ministry of Petroleum and Energy.
FMPR:	Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources.
GM:	General Manager.
GNPP:	Great Nigerian Peoples' Party.
GS:	General Secretary.
GSHQ:	General Staff Headquarters.
HCS:	Head of the Civil Service of the Federation/ Head of Service.
HND:	Higher National Diploma.
IAP:	Industrial Arbitration Panel.
IAT:	Industrial Arbitration Tribunal.
ICFTU:	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.
ILO:	International Labour Organisation.
IMF:	International Monetary Fund.
IRD:	Industrial Relations Department.
IRU:	Industrial Relations Unit. (Falomo).
LC/W:	Lateral Community in Work.
LPD:	Labour Process Dedate.
LPG:	Liquefied Petroleum Gas. (Mixture of Propane & Butane).
LUF:	Labour Unity Front.
MAN:	Manufacturers Association of Nigeria.
MCR:	Main Control Room.
MD:	Managing Director.
NAAPE:	National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers.
NANS:	National Association of Nigerian Students.
NAPRO:	National Association of Petroleum Refinery Operators.
NASU:	Non-academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions.
NBCI:	Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry.
NCCMI:	Nigeria Chambers of Commerce, Mines and Industry.
NCNC:	National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (after 1959 became National Council of Nigerian Citizens).
NEC:	National Executive Council. (NUPENG).



NECA:	Nigeria Employers Consultative Association.
NEP:	Nigerian Enterprises Promotions (decree) or Indigenization decree
NEPA:	National Electric Power Authority.
NEPB:	Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Board.
NEPU:	Northern Elements Peoples Union.
NET:	Nigerian External Telecommunications (Agency).
NIC:	National Industrial Court.
NJCC:	National Joint Consultative Council
NLC:	Nigeria Labour Congress. <sup>1</sup>
NMA:	Nigerian Medical Association.
NNDP:	Nigerian National Democratic Party. <sup>2</sup>
NNFL:	Nigeria National Federation of Labour.
NNOC:	Nigerian National Oil Corporation.
NNPC:	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.
NOLCHEM:	National Oil & Chemical Company (of Nigeria).
NPA:	Nigerian Ports Authority.
NPB:	National Planning Board.
NPC:	Northern Peoples Congress.
NPN:	National Party of Nigeria.
NPP:	Nigerian Peoples' Party.
NPRC:	Nigerian Petroleum Refining Company. (Alesa-Eleme, PortHarcourt.)
NSO:	Nigerian Security Organisation.
NTUC:	Nigerian Trade Unions Congress.
NUJ:	Nigeria Union of Jornalists.
NUNS:	National Unions of Nigerian Students.
NUPENG:	National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers.
NWC:	Nigerian Workers' Council.
NYM:	Nigerian Youth Movement.
OATUU:	Organisation of African Trade Union Unity.
OHCSF:	Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation.
OND:	Ordinary National Diploma.
PAD:	Public Affairs Department. (NNPC, Falomo).
PCD:	Petrochemical Division.
PED:	Projects and Engineering Division.
PENGASSAN:	Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria.
PPIB:	Productivity, Prices and Incomes Board.
PPMD:	Pipelines and Products Marketing Division.
PRP:	People's Redemption Party.
PSD:	Personnel and Services Division.
RATAWU:	Radio, Television and Theatre Workers' Union.
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Plan.
SC:	Sector Coordinator.
SFEM:	Second Foreign Exchange Market.
Shell-BP:	Shell-British Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited. (Pre-September 1979).
SHQ:	Supreme Headquarters.
SMC:	Supreme Military Council.
SPDC:	Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited or Shell. (Post-September 1979.)
TNCs:	Transnational Corporations.
TUC(N):	Trade Union Congress (of Nigeria).
TUCN:	Trade Union Congress of Nigeria.
UAC(N):	United Africa Company (of Nigeria).

<sup>1</sup>. 1st NLC was formed in 1950, the 2nd NLC in 1975 and present NLC in 1978.

<sup>2</sup>. Herbert Macaulay's NNDP (1923-1944) is different from S.L. Akintola's NNDP (1963-Jan.1966)

(x)

ULCN:	United Labour Congress of Nigeria.
UMBC:	United Middle Belt Congress.
UNIP:	United National Independence Party.
UPN:	Unity Party of Nigeria.
VC/W:	Vertical Community in Work.
VON:	Volkswagon of Nigeria.
WFTU:	World Federation of Trade Unions.
ZJCC:	Zonal Joint Consultative Council.

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And the gracious God, for the life of this 'bit of wood'.

## FOREWORD.

This study is, above all, about the men and women whose labour form the basis of Nigeria's economy and social stability: the petroleum workers. Those we will come across here, work in perhaps the most important single enterprise in Nigeria; the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. The study itself was inspired by (i) an attempt to understand what work and work relations mean for these people, and (ii) by my dissatisfaction with the conventional wisdom in Industrial Relations analysis; which in the past years has inspired the regulation of the working lives of these petroleum workers as much as any group of employees in Nigeria.

The study is on the NNPC, with special attention to the NNPC Refinery at Warri. The work itself is divided into three main parts; Part I, which is the Introductory section, is further divided in four chapters. Chapter 1 explores the main conceptual issues of this study, explains the research methods and examines some methodological issues that derive from the fieldwork. In Chapter 2, the labour process literature is reviewed, and this forms the analytical basis for the discussions in Parts II and III, while Chapters 3 and 4 provide the background information on Nigeria and NNPC respectively. Part II examines, under four chapters, the nature of work and processes of shopfloor relations in NNPC generally, with particular emphasis on the Refinery. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the nature of work and the internal labour market, while Chapters 7 and 8 look at the specific forms of relations on the shopfloor and their implications for shopfloor struggles. In Part III, I focus on unionism in the industry and the processes of interest mediation within the NNPC.

The study takes conceptual issues with the main contributions to the Labour Process debate and argues for a more studied and coherent re-assessment of Braverman's work, by recognizing its theoretical and methodological objectives. The study concludes with a re-exposition of the main conceptual issues; first by emphasizing that it is only within the framework of a rigorous conceptual redefinition of production relations that we can overcome the limitations of conventional Industrial Relations discourse. Second,

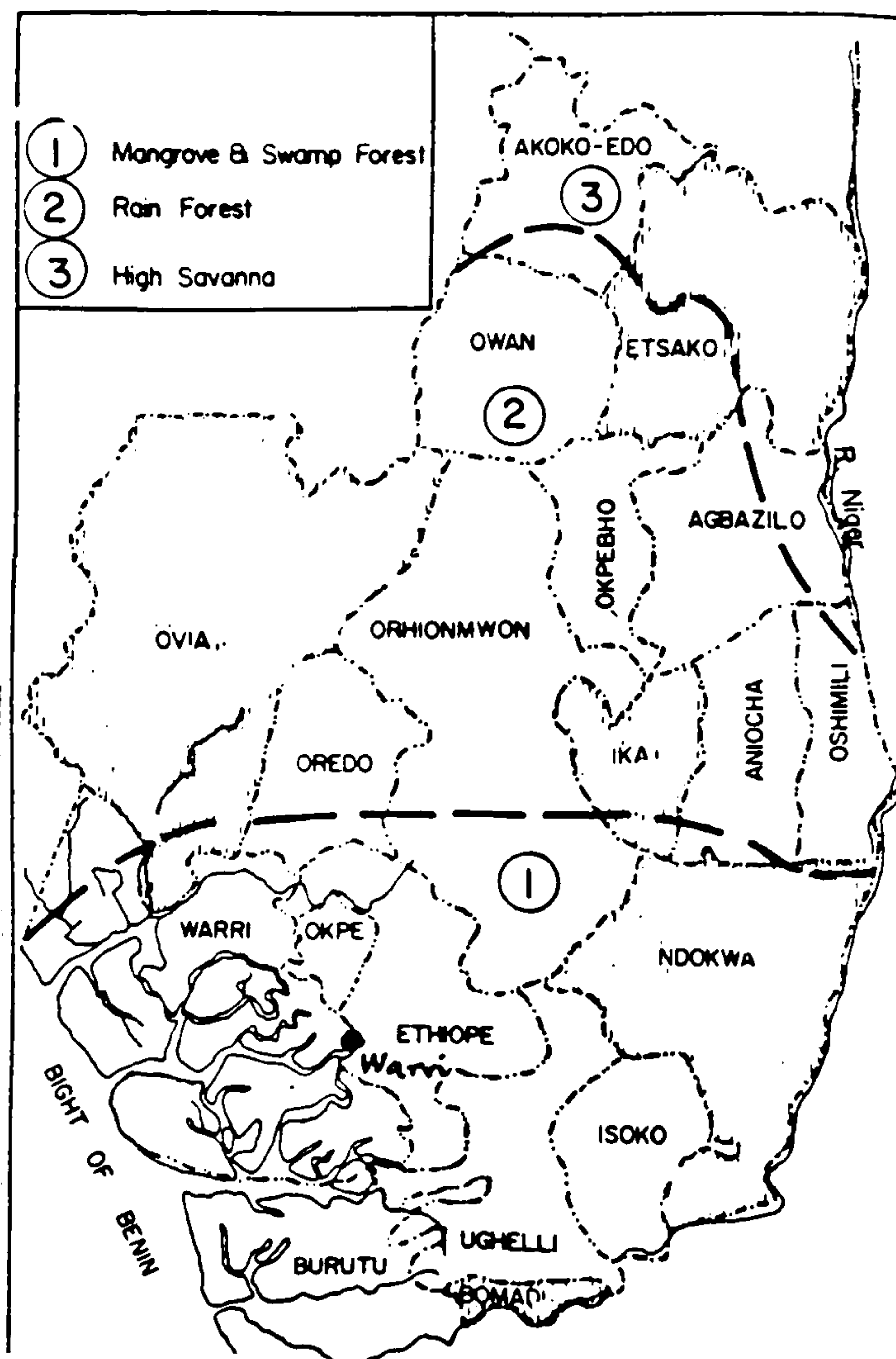
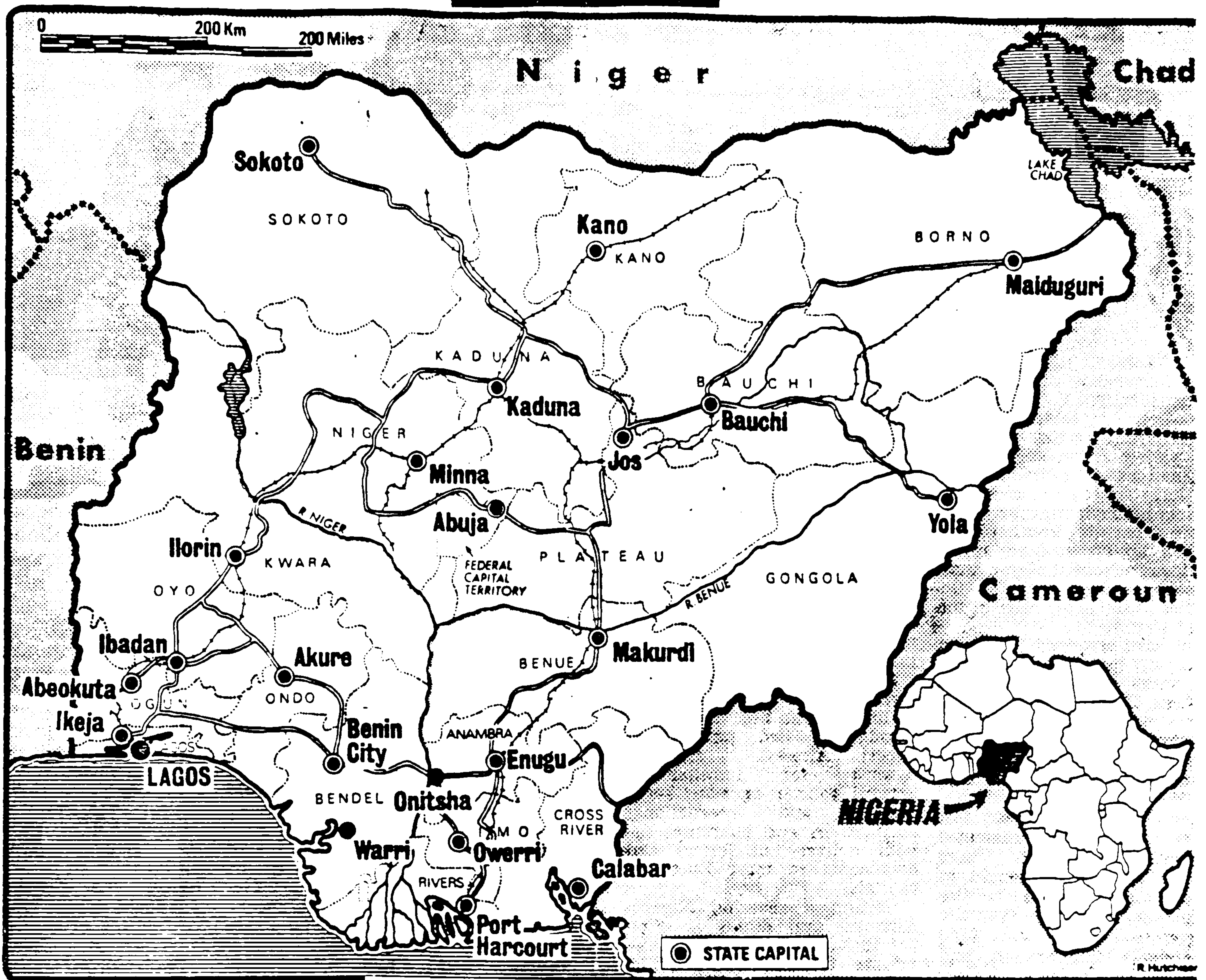


and central to this, is a re-conceptualized method of theory, which enables us to understand the socio-cultural peculiarities of each national or regional context, and overcome the limited vision of liberal-pluralist industrial relations ideology. In this sense, the study places strong emphasis on Marx's method of abstraction, both as a method of different levels of abstraction, and of one-sided abstraction.

The Refinery, where the bulk of the field research was done, is located in the riverine belt of southern Nigeria. Although often referred to as Warri Refinery, the plant is situated in the Ethiope local government area of Bendel State, outside Warri (see Map A). This complication is a result of the settlement pattern in this area of southern Nigeria; Warri, for instance, is surrounded by tiny pockets of settlements, each with distinct lineage/clan history and traditional political autonomy. Two of such settlements are Jeddo and Ekpan villages which share the north-western borders with Warri, but in a separate local government area. It is on the territories of these two villages that the Refinery is located, although I will continue to refer to the plant as Warri Refinery.



# NIGERIA





## Chapter 1.

### RESEARCH PROBLEMS, METHODS & METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES.

#### Introduction.

This chapter is concerned with five main issues. Section one defines the research problems of this study. This discussion is followed by an explanation, in section two, of the context of the research and the choice of the petroleum industry for this study. In section three, I explain both the ethnographic and the survey aspects of my field research. Apart from having a 'good story to tell', I believe the procedure of any research is central to the readers' evaluation of what they are asked to believe, and my research problems make such an explanation all the more salient.

In the discussion of the fourth issue, I explore the implications of my field experiences for some aspects of research methods in the social sciences; the concept of 'participant observation' and the survey method are of primary concern in this discussion. In the second part of this section, I explain the use of pidgin english in this study and outline the analytic procedure which guides my empirical and theoretical discussions. In section five, I outline the method of abstraction which forms the premise of this study: conceptual and analytical.

#### 1.1. The Research Problems.

The research problems of this study are rooted in my personal experiences. The nagging issues which form the backdrop of this study are what I saw as the problems of making sense of my experience of a peripheral capitalist context -like Nigeria- for the perspective of conventional explanation in, or justification for, Industrial Relations. These issues have remained the constant elements in this research. In the first part of this section, I outline these experiences which initiated the research problems that are put within the context of the wider discussion of theory in Industrial Relations. In the second part, I specify the research objectives and outline the extent to which my field



experiences compelled me to focus on some issues that were not part of my initial agenda.

#### 1.1.1. The Background to the Research Problems.

As a student sitting for his first Industrial Relations lectures some years ago, what I found most surprising was the endless pre-occupation with collective bargaining. This was not just in the empirical studies but in the 'theoretical' premise of the study area. Dunlop (1958) for instance, defined his project as the provision of the 'tools of analysis to interpret and gain understanding of the widest possible range of industrial relations facts and practices' (p.vii) and implied that Industrial Relations is about 'the work place and the work community' (pp. vii,342,380). However the 'industrial-relations system', defined as the context of creating a 'network or web of rules', (1958:13) is reduced to the elements and institutions of collective bargaining. This is despite Dunlop's recognition of 'collective bargaining agreements' (1958:16) as only one expression of the 'rules of the system'. Flanders writing in 1965 also wanted to demarcate the terrain of Industrial Relations from that of the other social sciences (1975:85). The impression of the parameters of Industrial Relations seems to be the gamut of 'employee-employer/management' relations (pp.86-91). However like Dunlop 'the study of industrial relations... [is] described as a study of the institutions of job regulation.' (p.86, emphasis mine); again like Dunlop, the rules for Flanders 'are either procedural or substantive.' Unions and managements involved in 'collective relations', (Flanders 1975:87) collective agreements etc., are the main objects of analysis. While Flanders, like many others, recognise other 'external' sources of job regulation -e.g. statutes-, 'priority is accorded to collective bargaining over [these] other methods' (Flanders 1975c:94). Quite often the 'priority' leads to the externality of the non-collective bargaining processes being made absolute, and this begins the slippage into seeing collective bargaining as synonymous with viable industrial relations.

My initial reaction was to put this conceptual framework within the context of Nigeria. In an economy where a sizable proportion of those in wage employment are neither unionised nor engaged in collective bargaining, the question was: Does it mean Indus-

trial Relations does not exist in those workplaces or work communities?. Before the retort of 'Oh, it's an underdeveloped country anyway', is made, the rapid expansion in part-time work and non-unionised employment in Britain of the 1980s is illustrative of the wider dimension of the 'naive' concern of a new recruit to the Industrial Relations fold. Within main stream Industrial Relations, the attempts to clean up the theoretical stable have not resolve this primary concern. Blain & Gennard's (1970) refinement of the 'Oxford' school through the incremental addition of 'the economic, sociological and technical factors' (p.405), or the Systems approach by adding psychological variables and the process of rules making (p.407), is still based on the notion that Industrial Relations is synonymous with collective bargaining. Bain & Clegg (1974) also expanded the range of issues to include informal or unstructured aspects. However, these were aspects of Flanders' category of 'job regulation' which as I note is identical to collective bargaining (c.f Clegg 1976:7).

While Wood et al (1975) highlighted Dunlop's mis-conception of the 'Parsonian project' (Hyman 1980:39), they actually tightened the theoretical noose of Industrial Relations by giving a restrictive definition of 'rule-making system'. 'Custom and practice' which Dunlop (1958:16), Flanders (1975:89), Brown (1973) and Bain & Clegg (1974) admit as elements of 'job regulation' were rejected by Wood et al (p.301). Only when C & P, as work place norms, are absorbed into the formal structures of 'Industrial Relations System' can they be admitted as part of the rule making process. Given the coincidence of this formulation with the attempt to institutionalise shop stewards 'movement' and shopfloor industrial relations in the 1970s, the eclectic empiricism of this 'theoretical' reformulation becomes obvious. Finally, Schienstock (1980) gave an incisive summary of the critique of Dunlop's Parsonian project and a thematic assessment of the different 'approaches' to Industrial Relations. However, his effort 'towards a theory of industrial relations' is resolved by recommending a cocktail of the Systems paradigm, 'industrial sociology' and the 'marxist approach'<sup>1</sup> (pp.184-6), without any apparent worry about the

<sup>1</sup> Schienstock's 'marxist' approach is familiarly made out of a Weberian menu (pp.180-4). See Clarke (1982:Ch.7) on marginalism, the trinity formula and Weber's sociology.



eclectic implications. None of these reformulations of Industrial Relations 'theory' resolved my basic worry.

The debate in the U.S. reveals an appreciation of an aspect of what I saw as a problem in conventional Industrial Relations academe. Heneman (1969:4) and Somers (1969a:44) for instance, insist on the gamut of work relations as the purview of Industrial Relations. Heneman also showed greater sensitivity to theory construct, albeit positivistic, than generally available in the academe. However beside the undertone remaining predominantly liberal-pluralist -which will be further developed below- the empirical contributions to the collection remained pre-occupied with collective bargaining (c.f Dunlop 1969, Joseph 1969, etc). Eight years later, the argument was more on how well industrial relations research was meeting policy making requirements than conceptual issues (Dunlop 1977, Rees 1977, Somers 1977, Ehrenberg et al 1977 and Dunlop 1977a). While Industrial Relations research acquired more sociological bent, in the British context, in the 1970s (Hyman 1987:5), most of such researches, as Winchester (1983:101) notes, was done within a narrower subject area than was defined by Bain & Clegg (1974). As Sisson (1987) further points out, most of the studies were on the engineering industry, an industry which did not pose much challenge to the restrictive definition of Industrial Relations. Even so, the sociological insights from these studies did not acquire any composite theoretical status.

Within the Nigerian context, most Industrial Relations teaching<sup>2</sup> and writing take the liberal-pluralist paradigm as given with its institutional bias (Yesufu 1962, Fashoyin 1980, Ubeku 1983, Akpala 1982, 1985, Damachi & Fashoyin 1986). Academic Industrial Relations in Nigeria was always sensitive to the local experiences which make the notion of collective bargaining as the sole form of industrial relations, suspect (vide Otobo 1982, Damachi 1984). On the one hand, there are recurrent instances of workers' collective struggles which do not involve any union organization. Lubeck's (1978, 1979, 1986) and Jackson's (1978) studies of workers' actions reveal processes that are indicative of this wider trend (see Cohen et al 1979). Within the pluralist schema this would have been

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<sup>2</sup> The subject only acquired distinct departmental and degree awarding status in Nigeria in the 1980s.

impossible to comprehend, considering that there are no unions, no procedural rules, and no collective bargaining. Even with Unions, the 'industrial relations' processes have never fitted easily with the liberal-pluralist agenda. The violation of procedural rules, the frequency of unofficial industrial actions, etc. would have classified most 'industrial relations' practices as being in the 'state of normlessness' (Flanders & Fox 1975:247). In any case, collective bargaining -as conventionally understood- rarely feature as a form of job regulation in the largest area of employment in Nigeria: the Civil Service (c.f. Damachi & Fashoyin 1986b, 1986c, Otobo 1981, 1982, 1986).

This realisation is an element in the tone of academic Industrial Relations in Nigeria. This tone was set in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the 'Kilby/Weeks debate'. For Kilby (1967, 1969) the recurrent trend of 'wage determination' by Wage Commissions (see Cohen 1974) rather than collective bargaining, indicated the failure of 'Anglo-Saxon [voluntarist] model' of industrial relations. The participants in the debate (Warren 1966, 1969; Weeks 1968, 1971; Berg 1969, Cohen 1971) disagreed on the extent of Nigerian trade unions' influence on the creation and outcome of the wage commissions. There was however, little doubt that most of the workers' collective struggles did not follow the pluralists' sacred road of apolitical procedural or substantive 'job regulation'. While the failure of the 'voluntarist' model is therefore a standard element in Industrial Relations discourse, the sensitivity to history and national experience was often breached by the reversion to recommending a greater adherence to institutionalized collective bargaining, rather than re-conceptualize the subject area. This is often because many of the contributors subscribe to an implicit assumption of liberal-pluralism, i.e. that a smooth collective bargaining process is indicative of a country's [or people's] level of development. (see Damachi 1984)

The Kilby/Weeks debate, in so far as it highlights the experience of Union or workers' collective struggle in Nigeria, raises a second dimension of my initial apprehension about conventional Industrial Relations. Namely making sense of a specific context in which (i) collective articulation of workers' demands involved them more in political processes rather than collective bargaining and (ii) every major strike acquires an immediate political dimension. The idea that somehow ('mature') Industrial Relations must be



apolitical (Flanders 1975c) is, even on an empirical level, deeply ethnocentric (vide Hyman 1975, 1980). The same notion of immature societies was explicit in Kilby. Concepts like 'political unionism' and 'political actions' (Clegg 1976:5) were invented to deal - dismissively- with experiences of other societies which throw the spanner into the pluralist engine; the death of this attitude has been grossly exaggerated (e.g. Flanders 1965, 1975c:83). The post-1976 experience of 'industrial relations' in Nigeria -with the strong emphasis on collective bargaining-oriented processing of work relations (see Chapter 3)- shows that even where all the institutional parameters are present the expression of workers' grievances can violate the sanctity of Procedural Rules. I witnessed some of this as an Administrative Officer, with personnel duties, in the Civil Service in 1981.

However to treat the whole field of study with dismissive derision (e.g. Marsden 1982) is to miss the point that even the most stringent collective bargaining procedure is a form of managing production relations (Hyman 1980:42). For me the issue was (and still is) to make sense of work relations within a specific capitalist, albeit peripheral, context, with or without collective bargaining, and to locate the 'collective bargaining' processes within the specific relations of production. This requires a distinct analytical standpoint from the one adopted in conventional Industrial Relations.

The critique of pluralism in Goldthorpe's (1977) and Fox's (1973, 1974, 1975, 1977) works have demonstrated a number of the problems in the paradigm. Its Durkhemian functionalist view of production relations, the insistence on Parsonian ideological consensus among elements involved in the relations, its naive understanding of power and above all the presentation of an ideological view of work and work relations as a scientific endeavour. On an empirical level, pluralism represents an empiricist academia which presents a historically given experience as the essence of Industrial Relations. (Hyman 1975:10, 1987; Marsden 1982) This is not just a problem of theory but also of the method of theory (see Preface and Ch. 11). The radical alternative to pluralism was bogged down in a 'power and social conditioning' thesis of bargaining relations and was at best a radical Fabian treatise (Fox 1974:283-6). A pupil exists in a power and social conditioning relation with the teacher as the peasant with the land owner, that does not make either rela-

tions an equivalent of relations in the context of commodity production. Fox's schema is not quite appreciative of this dimension or the issue of the method of theory.

However a distinct perspective, which takes the organization and relations of production as its starting point was developing at the same time. Hyman (1975:ix) wrote of 'an approach which grasps "industrial relations" as an element in a totality of social relations of production'. He stressed the 'capitalist character' of the economies in which most industrial relations studies are undertaken, and the commodity status of the worker's labour-power (p.19). As Hyman (1980:46) points out;

It is ironic that conventional writers on industrial relations have developed often sophisticated discussions of 'job regulations' and 'system of rules' without any apparent recognition that the elaborate procedural and institutional superstructure on which they focus has its foundation in the sphere of production.

An appreciation of this sphere must therefore be the starting point of an alternative analysis of industrial relations. Unlike Weberians however, such analysis must appreciate 'the production of surplus value as an integral component of the processes under examination.' (Hyman 1980:47) 'Distributional relations' as Nolan (1983:302) notes, 'are governed by the framework of social relationships within production'. In re-discovering Marx's analysis of the capitalist labour process and 'its specific character... as the motor of valorization and accumulation', Braverman (1974), as Hyman points out 'provides a basis for elucidating the theoretical problems which bourgeois approaches can scarcely begin to formulate.' (1980:46) Among other things, it allows for an elucidation of 'the class character of the managerial function' (ibid), the primarily social character of production, and locating the nature and forms that work relations acquire, within the context of production relations. However;

The state of 'industrial relations' or of class struggle cannot be simply 'read off' from a generalized characterization of the economic and political conjuncture, but equally cannot be understood except against this background. What is at issue is the specificity of institutions and the processes of mediation which are in some respects distinctive in each nation, industry, company and individual workplace, and which can alter in their effects over time. (Hyman 1980:51)

Crucial here is the understanding of the industrial relations and the collective bargaining processes as institutions and processes of mediation; the mediation of production



relations. As a means of mediating production relations, collective bargaining cannot be the only form. For me, this becomes the starting point in making sense of the nature and processes of 'industrial relations' within the Nigerian context. Given the rapid expansion in the academic discussion on the labour process, this discussion will be my theoretical starting point. Not only because of its root in production<sup>3</sup>, but also the development of the category of 'production politics' by Burawoy (1984,1985). The category offers the potential for looking at the forms and nature of work relations and struggles, in its many forms, primarily from the perspective of production relations. Burawoy's work on Zambia (1979, 1985) also offers a perspective on a peripheral capitalist context which is important for this study.

### 1.1.2. Specifying the Research Problems.

It is important at the outset here to emphasize that this study is primarily exploratory in the sense of understanding the processes involved, and explicatory, in the sense of offering explanations. The central research problems are therefore;

- (a) To explore the nature of work and work relations within the Nigerian peripheral capitalist context. The Refinery at Warri provides the specific context of the research, and the focus is on work collectivities as the basis for relations and workers' action.
- (b) To explore the processes and institutions of mediation, the linkages between the formal processes of mediation and the generalized production relations explored in (a) above. The emphasis is on the extent and limits of the autonomy of the processes of mediation, and how far they can be taken as the sole framework of articulating production politics.

'Work', in this context, is a specific labour process involving commodity production. The relations arising from it are understood as distinct capital/labour(-power) relations. However this understanding is against the background of the distinct character of the economy i.e., a peripheral capitalist economy interacting with other non-capitalist production processes and social relations. These are central, not incidental, to this study. While the study started on this basis of the character of the economy, the context of the research compelled me to pay further attention to two aspects of the study. First, the specific character of the unit of capital around which production and relations are

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<sup>3</sup> I should point out the plural -sometimes chaotic- nature of the 'Labour Process debate' (see Chapter 2).



organized as State-owned capital. This I discovered, is central to every dimension of the issues that I am interested in. Second, is the discovery of layers of social communities in work which were not limited to the conventional sociological notion of 'work-group'. Explaining these social communities compelled a deeper appreciation of the linkages between non-work community and work, between non-capitalist and capitalist processes of the reproduction of social life, than I initially anticipated.

## 1.2. The Research Context.

Specifying the objectives of a research is only an aspect of a study; the context of the research is equally significant. The choice of the petroleum industry was made from the very beginning, for a number of reasons. As I explain in Chapters 3 and 4, the industry has become the most important sector of the Nigerian economy. For instance, in 1960 - when Nigeria became formally 'independent'- petroleum accounted for 2.6% of total exports and 1.0% of Federal Government revenue, but by the 1980s the figures were between over 96% and 86% respectively. The oil industry has become the country's life line, for the same reason, work relations in the industry are of primary relevance to the economy. From the perspective of State functionaries, an industry-wide action for instance, not only threatens the supply of petroleum products but the very basis of the economy and state revenue earnings. The State remains acutely sensitive to workers' actions in the industry and has responded with punitive laws, like the 1977 Petroleum Anti-Sabotage Decree, or the banning of unions that violate the 1976 and 1977 Trade Disputes laws. However, my cursory understanding is that this had not diminished the propensity for spontaneous, 'unofficial' shopfloor actions. This would suggest a fertile terrain within which to examine the nature of relations outside the institutions of mediation and the linkages of the latter to general production relations. It is therefore not just a study of any industry but by far the most significant sector of the Nigerian economy.

It is one thing to have a general idea of the industry to study, getting down to doing field research is however another issue. My initial research plan was to study the two largest companies in the industry, namely Shell and the NNPC. Shell refused me access, but this turned out to have a positive dimension: it forced me to do a concentrated and

in-depth study of the Warri Refinery in particular, and NNPC in general. The choice of NNPC, as I explain in Chapter 4, rests on its being the single most important corporation in Nigeria. Given the State's oil policy, NNPC as a state-owned concern, has complete control over the down stream operations in the oil industry. The choice of the refinery on the other hand as the main area of study,<sup>4</sup> was encouraged by the guarantee of access through a friend working there. I was, for instance, able to run a pilot survey in the plant in September 1984; this was however one of a number of reasons for choosing the plant. First, the refinery is the first fully State-owned complex in Nigeria. The Refinery is also routinely responsible for all the internally produced propane and butane and some 50% of other refined products in Nigeria. Second, my cursory understanding of the collective relations in the industry showed the centrality of the plant workers for collective action and the union in the industry. The nature of the access allowed me in the NNPC made it possible to retain an element of comparison in the study, by focusing on work relations in the clerical work-process areas at the Corporation's Headquarters in Lagos (Falomo)<sup>5</sup> and the shopfloor in the Refinery.

### 1.3. Doing the Research: On Method.

In the light of the research problems, especially the need to understand the social processes in work, it was clear that the research method would include extended presence on the shopfloor and a great deal of interview, formal or conversational. There are however a number of reasons that preceded the finalization of the research project, which inspired my choice of working on the shopfloor in the refinery as my primary research method. As a student at Ibadan, especially during my pupillage with Professor Omafume Onoge, I picked up a bias for anthropological 'method': doing basic research means sharing in the daily experiences of your research 'subjects'. The bias was reinforced by Beynon's Working for Ford, Burawoy's Manufacturing Consent and Nichols & Beynon's Living with Capitalism, in distinct ways. My reaction to how the organization of work generates

<sup>4</sup> The refinery was initially just one of the three labour processes I chose to study. The others were the oil rig, and petroleum road haulage processes.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this study, 'Falomo' refers to the NNPC Head Office, in the sense of its physical location or a head office's policy making authority. Falomo is in the western part of Ikoyi, south-east of Lagos island.



'consent' in Burawoy's work was mainly methodological, i.e as something only a sustained experience on the shopfloor could produce.<sup>6</sup> Beynon and Nichols added a significant element, namely the rendering of workers' statements in their own voices. The feeling that those being researched are not just objects of study but living and active human beings, flows through every page of the work. It is partly stylistic, but it requires a sustained presence among those being 'studied'.

Before going into detail, an overview of the fieldwork is in order; this provides a broad outline of the subsequent, more detailed, discussions. The fieldwork started on 10 June 1985. Between June and July, I was in the Industrial Relations Unit of the NNPC Headquarters, Falomo. This period was spent mainly trying to make sense of the Union organization, and the institutions and processes of mediation in the industry. I was allowed unlimited access to the Unit's documents, attendance at a major Union/Management meeting at Port Harcourt and less formal interaction between the Union and the IRU officials. I was also able to undertake extensive conversational and formal interviews with Union and Unit officials and workers at the headquarters. In August, I moved to the Warri Refinery and remained there till mid-December when I returned to Falomo. In Warri, I spent the first two weeks in the Industrial Relations department before moving into the Process Plant. My stay in the IRD allowed me access to official documents, getting to know the local union officials and the processes of mediation in the plant. I also had the opportunity to attend a zonal consultative meeting and sit-in on 3 union meetings in the Plant. I worked in the plant until mid-October when I moved into the Maintenance department where I worked until mid-December. Between then and the second week in January 1986, I rounded up the fieldwork with further interviews in Lagos with the Union's (NUPENG) national officials and the collection of official documents.

<sup>6</sup> Gouldner's Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, Wildcat Strike and Baldamus's Efficiency and Effort had similar effect on me as an undergraduate.

### 1.3.1. On the Shopfloor.

I use the phrase 'on the shopfloor' instead of 'participant observation' for reasons I will outline later. The phrase also refers to the time I spent in the offices, not just the 'shopfloor' in the traditional sense.

Having secured approval to do the research in NNPC before arriving in Lagos, my arrival at Falomo was not unexpected. In the first few days, the Head of the IRU took me over to the Manpower Planning department (MPD) of the corporation for an assessment of my research agenda and to collect letters of introduction, from MPD, to the divisional heads. By the end of the week I had been handed over to one of the Industrial Relations Officers (IROs) in the Unit and I was to share an office with the five IROs and the office attendant for the duration of my stay in the Unit. The initial advantage of working in this office was the (relatively) shared experience I had with the IROs. They were all between 27 and 35 years old. One was an undergraduate with me at Ibadan, another studied in England and a third had just finished a Master's degree program in Industrial Relations. I suspect the ice was quickly broken with reminiscences over shared experiences. Nonetheless, the problem of suspicion about my motive or 'disclosures' that may arise from my work was not absent, this became obvious in my second week in the Unit. It was just before the end of the lunch break, I was working on a file and across the room an IRO was taking a short nap. Another IRO walked into the office, took the view in and called out to the dozing IRO;<sup>7</sup>

Don't sleep o, you know Jimi is here, he will put it in his thesis!

Here was a direct threat to my gaining further access beyond just sitting in the office and perusing the files. I had spent my time up till that time being unintrusive. I had been worried about intruding on their conversations in the office, I wanted to avoid putting a foot wrong. I kept to asking only questions of clarification on issues of unions and industrial relations, I wanted to 'study' the ground before getting involved; but precisely because of my abstention, I was highlighting my status as an outsider who was not getting involved and therefore putting everyone on edge. All these of course became

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<sup>7</sup> He probably never realised how right he was, neither did I until now.



clear later in jokes. When the above comment was made I felt the whole project turning into sand in my fingers, it was perhaps the sense of doom that spurred my response. I explained that I could not say it was not an issue that interested me -taking a nap, that is- and whatever interest I had was purely sociological. My research view-point is not managerialist anyway, and that I could understand why someone who had to leave his home before 6 a.m. to beat the famous Lagos traffic jam, would be feeling knackered at 2 p.m. I probably rescued something because the discussion for most of the afternoon revolved around the theme of Lagos public transport system and its effects on work and relations at work.<sup>8</sup>

As my stay in the Unit went on, I learnt to extend my relations with the IROs and the workers beyond office hours. Our discussions increasingly went beyond my work to issues of social and family lives, politics, religion, etc. However, I never became a 'fly on the wall' or 'a piece of office furniture', everyone I was in contact with knew I was doing field research and issues rotate around this on a daily basis. How else could I ask questions that would otherwise sound stupid or obvious, and still get sympathetic answers?. I spent most of my time in Falomo, working on departmental files and talking to people and conducting interviews. However it was in the ordinary day's discussion and observing people's reactions to new management instructions or developments within the corporation, that I built my initial images of social relations processes within the corporation. In the offices, the staff canteen or the corporation's staff buses, eavesdropping on conversations became a source of 'data gathering'; this raises the problem of record keeping. When I could not jot down notes -e.g. in the canteen- I had to make mental notes of people's comments and reaction to incidents. In the IRU office, it was easier in the sense that since I was always making notes from the files, I could record conversations verbatim without arousing suspicion. These notes had to be arranged in the evening to form the day's field notes.

The longer I stayed, the wider the circle of people I knew, union officials and workers; junior and senior staff. This made it easy to walk into offices, sit back and read

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<sup>8</sup> A similar incident happened five months later in Warri Refinery's Maintenance department; see below.

the day's paper and cock an ear to the on-going conversations or get involved in a discussion. It also became easy to arrange discussions with management personnel in their offices. As I explain later, these discussions were strictly 'off the record'. I imagine they now call it 'plausible deniability'. At each point, I had to take the internal politics of the corporation into consideration in evaluating comments or information volunteered to me. The advantage of multiple sources of information is that I could weigh one source against the other, and these sources against available documents, and vice versa. I could also ask for clarification on contradictory statements or interpretations of events, but in the end I had to make up my mind about the plausible explanation. This was also the case with being able to sit-in on Union-Management meetings, observe relations between the union officials and the management personnel and attend union meetings; these also happened in Warri. These provided invaluable sources of independent appraisal of the social relations. In most of these instances, I believe that my presence was unobtrusive; in the circumstances, I was able to observe these relations in their 'natural habitat'.

In August, I moved to Warri and spent the first two weeks in the IRD. I had the advantage of having a friend, Peter, working in the department. He re-introduced me to the Head of IRD and others with whom he (Peter) shared a large office, some of whom I had met during my previous visit to the plant. An additional advantage was that the IRD attracts a continuous stream of students on attachment (there were three such students in the department when I arrived); the presence of student-researchers had become routine and this made it easier to blend into the terrain. After the lessons at Falomo, I was a little bit wiser and I had the added advantage of the departmental plurality of the office I shared with Peter and the others. Since the office was shared by the staff of three departments and I was supposed to be interested in union/management relations, what was happening in the office on a daily basis was not felt to be within my range of interest; except when such issues are about workers' grievances. I therefore had the advantage, as in the IRU office at Falomo, of an office that was forever bustling with activity, without the disadvantage of making everyone apprehensive.

My primary sources of data were perusing the departmental files, observing the daily goings-on, listening to and participating in discussions in the offices. It was also



possible to make verbatim notes of discussions since for most of the time I worked on files. Discussions and events in the canteen, in the staff buses or just around the offices also proved to be mines of information, with which I began putting together a complex picture of social relationship in and outside the workplace. Most of these, however emerged after I moved to the plant since an advantage of the shift work for me was that I could come into the office before or after my shift. My overall impression is that of gaining and renegotiating access in the Administrative section of the refinery proved the least hazardous.

### **Inside The Process Plant.**

Moving into the plant proved, on the other hand, the most challenging and rewarding period of the fieldwork. My first extended contact was with the Supervisor for Process Plant Area I, although I first had to secure the approval of the Head of Production department. Because the supervisor was tied up with work when I first met him, I had to fix an appointment for the following day when he could attend to me. I reported to him the following morning and explained that I was interested in working directly on the shopfloor, within the permissible limits, of course. I was fortunate to have a very amiable Supervisor, who besides wondering why in heaven's name I wanted to do such a thing - since I was not an engineer in need of practical experience- was ready to help. I spent the first two-and-half days with the Supervisor who explained the operations of the various units of the refinery and personnel distribution to me.

On the third day, he introduced me to the Chief Operator of the afternoon Shift. This was the first move in my joining Shift B, in which I was to spend a considerable portion of my time in the refinery. However, on that Thursday afternoon the crew was just returning to work after the three-day rest that follows the night shift. Just as in my encounter with the Supervisor, I had to sit back and ask questions only when I felt I was not in the way, the last thing I wanted was for someone to feel I was hindering the performance of his/her work. The first days in the Control Room and in the Supervisors' office was useful in having an initial insight, through passive observation into the relations among Supervisors, between them and the Control Room Operators and the Plant Opera-

tors. The five days spent in the Supervisors' office and the Control Room were also useful in terms of being introduced to other supervisors and operators. I had my first experience of the hectic nature of the plant operation and people trying to cope during this week.

By Saturday afternoon, I felt ready for an introduction to the plant and the Plant Operators I would work with. Unknown to me the second major challenge to the meaning and purpose of my presence in the corporation, since Falomo was lying in wait for me. I put the request for the introduction to Willie, the Chief Operator, who called Geepe, a Plant Operator on the address system. Geepe came into the Control Room and Willie asked him to show me around. I followed Geepe into the process plant and introduced myself to him by name, foolishly, I did not expatiate on my mission. I thought I would do that later when I could give a full explanation about my work. Midway through the plant tour, Geepe casually asked if I was an Industrial Training Fund (ITF) attachee or a Petrochemical Division (PCD) trainee.<sup>9</sup> I replied that I was not, but before I could explain further, he looked me in the eyes and asked if I was working for the government!. It was a totally unexpected question. 'Who?, Me?, Working for the government?(!)' I asked soundlessly. I realised unless I sorted myself out with him that could be curtains for my fieldwork. I had to explain every thing about my work without seeming to be throwing the twin facts that I was doing a doctoral research and doing it in England, in his face. It seemed like eternity, to me, while I sorted things out in my mind and explained what I was doing to him. I was not sure if I satisfied his curiosity or suspicion, but he continued with the excursion. After the tour he took me to a kiosk-shelter in the plant where we met four other Operators. After Geepe introduced me I thought now was the time to get the whole thing out on the table and hope for the best.

I explained again that I was interested in a study of 'industrial relations' from the perspective of shopfloor relations, and the nature of work from the perspective of people doing it. I explained my interest in the study of work (employment) relations in biographical terms: my childhood in a wage earning family and a 'working class neighbourhood', and my early interest in workplace activism inspired by my father who was a shopfloor ac-

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<sup>9</sup> An ITF attachee is a University or Polytechnic student sent to an industrial firm, under the ITF program, to gain practical experience. PCD trainees, however, are NNPC's PCD new employees being trained in the refinery.



tivist. Finally, I explained my dissatisfaction with both the conventional concept and practice of 'industrial relations', which was reinforced by my experience in the Civil Service. Earlier in the process of my explanation I had shown Geepe and the others my Warwick University student identity card, so they will know I was not 'working for the government'. I had introduced myself only by my first name to Geepe and others initially, but the ID card had my initials (J.O.T) written together without any space. Almost as soon as the ID card was passed to him, Geepe shot back and said; 'But you said you're Jimi, the name here is JOT', again I had to explain the problem. In any case, after what might have seemed like a self-delivered 'This is Your Life', Douglass, one of the Operators inside the kiosk and a former union Treasurer, responded by saying that when I first came into the kiosk he thought I was 'one of **them**', i.e. another university-trained managerialist upstart.

Over the next hour, I listened to Douglass's account of the handling of industrial relations, union activities, aspects of their experiences of work in the plant, etc; by the end of the shift, I had met other Operators in the Area. I had overcome the initial obstacle of acceptance, but there was nothing to feel victorious about. There was nothing triumphant about what life on the shopfloor meant to them. Two days earlier I had watched, from the window of the supervisors' office, Operators being drenched by a heavy rain fall who could not take shelter because the job demanded it. Geepe had told me, with pain in his eyes, that the NNPC hierarchy had 'no regard for them'. On my part it was just the beginning of a long, hard trek and I had not justified their initial acceptance of me or proved that I was not just another university-trained upstart. Any cock-up over the next months and that could be the end, but it was a good start. Members of the Shift B crew were to become my closest friends and confidants, in and outside the plant, throughout my fieldwork.

The following week, when Shift B moved to the night shift, I received my work clothes -a green boilersuit- and helmet. Because I had the status of a trainee Operator I was never allowed to do any job on my own -I did not have the skill, either-, nonetheless staying and working with the Operators also enhanced their acceptance of me. I discovered that the novelty of a researcher working on the shopfloor, together with aspects of

my idiosyncrasies proved quite helpful. Some were, for instance, surprised that I ate and (shared) kolanut with them. Douglass told me he thought 'bin to'<sup>10</sup> people do not eat kolanut.

Over the next two months, I worked, discussed and argued with the Operators. My personal involvement in many of the tasks, perhaps enhanced my appreciation of issues from the workers' point of view. Working in the plant also allowed me the relative freedom to move among different groups of Operators and between the plant and the Control Room. The added advantage of the Control Room is that because the three Process Areas (see Chapter 4) and the Oil Movement have their control consoles within the 'room', it was possible to relate to different sections at the same time. Observation and participation in many of the social processes in the Control Room and the plant also allowed me to become sensitive to the variations across work areas and among the workers themselves, as well as the uniformities among them.

The development of personal ties with many of the Operators allowed our relationship to go beyond the working hours. This process of after work interaction really took off with my being invited to some of the Operators' family parties: child-naming ceremony and birthday parties or just simple visits to their homes, which I also reciprocated. On each occasion I met other workers in different shifts or sections of the refinery. Getting to know their wives, children, girl-friends and going out together for drinks, apart from reinforcing my 'credentials' with them, sensitized me to the non-work processes on workplace relations. In other words a more rounded understanding of work and workers' collectives. The worker can be seen as a father, a husband, a son, etc; it also meant of course that we can discuss many issues of research relevance in more relaxed settings. This process also extended to my personal relationship with some of the supervisory and management personnel, although I will highlight some aspects of the problems of relating to these categories of staff later. As was the case in Falomo, it became easier to tap into the grapevine which helped me in solving some jig-saw puzzles or led my inquiry in particular directions.

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<sup>10</sup> 'Bin to' is pidgin for 'I've been to (London)' as a ridicule of the petty bourgeois arrogance of Nigerians, trained abroad, who return home Anglicized or Americanized.



The maintenance of this personal relationship also helped in locating the most important sources of information on some issues. As an example, I once asked Braimah -an Operator- some questions on the current union activities. He said he could not be of much help, but promised to put me in touch with a member of the union executive who was also on the night shift. About two hours later, Braimah was introducing me to Jeff. Braimah was putting his seal of approval on me when he told Jeff; 'He's alright'; the advantage of this was that it eased my access to various key informants. In Jeff's case I spent the period between 2 a.m and 4.30 a.m. discussing the intra-union relations and relations with management with him, and seven hours later he was introducing me to the union's zonal chairman in the junior staff club of the refinery.

I was however able to diversify my access points precisely because I started with a crew working Shift. For instance, I maintained my links with the Administrative block by coming to the refinery in the morning if I was on the afternoon shift, staying on till 4 p.m. if I was on the morning shift, and till 12 noon if I was on the night shift. During these periods, I met and established contacts with different union officials and workers. I also continue working on the IRD files and asked for clarification from the IRD staff or other people, in the block, on issues that emerged in my inquiries. These periods were also sometimes spent with members of the other shifts, particularly in the Control Room and the Process Area II (see Chapters 4 and 5). Apart from helping me diversify my sources, contacts with members of other crews allowed me to evaluate the extent to which some of the processes I witnessed and experienced with members of Shift B were peculiar to them or more widespread.

#### **In the Maintenance Department.**

In mid-October, I moved to the Maintenance department. I chose the department as the second area of study before the fieldwork started. However the multiplicity of units within the department and their operations, meant I had a second stage sampling to do. I could not go through all the units, within the time I had, even if I wanted to. The sampling process was facilitated by my improved knowledge of the refinery. I chose the Instruments section because many of its units are representative of the less manual, more

technological side of maintenance jobs in the plant. On the other hand, I selected the Boilermakers unit because it was typical of the more manual and dirty aspect of maintenance job. The unit also had the reputation for being a high accident rate unit with an unpleasant work environment.

As in other departments, my entrance into the Maintenance department was through the Head who handed me over to the Superintendent for the Instrument section, with whom I was able to strike a warm relationship from the beginning. I realised that, people were quite willing to discuss their experiences. This openness was facilitated by my position as an outsider interested in their experiences of work and industrial relations from their perspective. For the next three weeks, I accompanied workers in Instrument workshop and Process Plant Instrument units on their job rounds. For most of the time, I carried work tools and acted as an 'apprentice', since I did not have the skill to perform any maintenance job; this was the closest I came to 'working' with them. As in the Process plants and the offices, being in the workshop, moving around with the workers and working shift made intensive observation, listening and acquiring a feel for their experience of work possible.

When in November, I moved to the Boilermakers unit, I decided to alter my mode of entry, this was prompted by a mundane spirit of adventure. On a serious note, however I was aware that since my arrival in June I had been given the equivalent of a red carpet treatment by the supervisory personnel, I believe, because they knew I was a researcher. This was sharply brought home to me when the Instruments workshop Supervisor introduced me to the workers as 'doctor' and I had to spend the rest of the day explaining to everyone that I was, in actual fact, an ordinary student. I was curious to see what difference it would make to my reception if I concealed my identity, for once. One thing was in my favour, namely that there were many new employees of the Warri Petrochemical plant being trained in the plant at the time; the PCD trainees. Since many of them were Polytechnic and University graduates, and I wear glasses, I could disguise as one of them. The disguise was helped by the movement of the PCD trainees between the units at the end of October. This meant their individual identities would take some time to become established with the Supervisors. The manual nature of the work in the Boilermakers unit



and my assumed trainee status meant eye-brows would not be raised if my ineptitude showed. To avoid any problem, I informed the unit's Supervisor, in the staff canteen two weeks before, that I would be joining his unit. Since he had been seeing me in the canteen for some months he assumed I was a PCD trainee. Some of the other workers in the unit, with whom I had become acquainted knew I was doing research, but most did not.

If I wanted to have a 'real' experience of work relations I did not have to wait for a long time. Soon after I joined the unit, I was put in a work-gang which would handle the cutting of some metal tubes which would be used to repair a Heat Exchanger. The Supervisor gave us a 'crash course' on how to cut the tubes and then left us to handle the task. Some hours later a Superintendent came around to check on our progress and he discovered that some of the tubes were too short (see Chapter 6). Within minutes both the Superintendent and the Supervisor descended on us, with verbal assaults and threats to surcharge us for the damaged tubes. The importance of this incident for the discussion here is that when the Supervisor later realised I was a researcher -I could not keep the disguise for long-, I received what is an equivalent of an apology from him. He called me a 'rascal' for sneaking up on him and explained why it was necessary to keep the workers on their toes by 'descending on them once in a while'.<sup>11</sup>

In the Boilermakers unit, I was directly involved in the work. I was pressed into work-gangs and received advice from the older hands in the unit about how to survive the work. It is however difficult to ascribe my direct experience to my PCD identity. Although my 'cover was blown' by the second week I did not receive any distinctly differently treatment from the workers. I received the usual advice and I was still detailed into work-gangs like before, although often at my own insistence. I later realise that although PCD trainees were on training, not much was expected of them. Both the idea that they were transient members of a unit and that they were treated as 'green horns' meant they were under less pressure than the permanent workers in the unit. My cover was, to an extent, the wrong one. In any case, for most of my six weeks with the Boilermakers, observation and listening were the most crucial sources of information gathering and mak-

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<sup>11</sup> To be fair to him, he never carried out the threat of surcharging the workers for the tubes.

ing sense of the social processes of the shopfloor. What I missed at the initial stage was the flexibility of being able to freely ask questions and sometimes initiate collective discussions. I realised this at the end of my second week in the unit.

I had spent the lunch half-hour having a most incisive discussion with a former Chairman of NUPENG in the refinery on the crisis within the union. I had to record the discussion before I lost the (verbatim) trend of it. In the excitement of recording the discussion on paper, I headed for the first seat I could get, which was in the Foremen's office in the Boilermakers unit, rather than the toilet as was my usual practice. I must have been scribbling furiously when one of the Foremen asked loudly; 'Are we safe?'. I realised too late that I was supposed to have an undeclared identity. For the first few seconds, I pretended I did not hear the question. By then of course the number of people in the office had increased from three to five, and I thought, well you better own up. I looked up, saw his gaze focused on me and asked in pidgin, if the question was meant for me. He replied in the affirmative and repeated his question. I knew I had to explain, which I did. I cannot quite explain why what followed did. Perhaps many of them had seen me in the plant for months with other workers and did not feel they had anything to fear after my explanation. In any case, within minutes the room was in full swing of discussion of the nature of work in the unit, their relations with and perception of the Management. I found myself being told by the workers, to take special notice of someone's comment or an incident.

By the time the discussion was broken up by a Superintendent, the number of participants had increased many times over, although many who joined later probably never knew how it started in the first place. It simply became one of the usual impromptu discussions and arguments that occur naturally throughout the plant. For me, it meant that from then on, I could walk up to people and ask them specific questions. I also had people calling my attention to things or asking me to make 'a special study' of an issue or unit. My exit from the Boilermakers unit in mid-December also marked the end of my fieldwork in Warri.

Before moving on to the discussion of the other methods, some comments on the fieldwork need to be made. These concern the problem of surviving the multiple sources



of information, especially in the refinery. A surprise of the fieldwork for me, was that while I avoided highlighting the degree target of the fieldwork on the shopfloor, with the middle and senior management personnel, the fact that I was doing a post-graduate research made it easy to gain access to them. Many of them felt that they could easily talk to me since I was an outsider, with no stake in their internal politics. My position as a petty bourgeois 'academic' was presumed as a guarantee for empathy. There were others who were positively intrigued by my ethnographic method. The rich and diverse access allowed me to understand the complexity of the group called 'management' and their politics (see Chapters 7 and 10).

I was however faced with the problem of the implication of my access to the management personnel for the shopfloor workers. I had noticed the suspicion that this access generated among some junior workers in Falomo, there was a real danger that I could snitch on them, as I explain below. I therefore came to Warri, aware that I had to avoid that problem. With the shopfloor workers of Shift B, I decided to inform them every time I had to see any supervisory or other management personnel. I also briefed them on the general thrust of the discussions I had with anyone, to reassure the Operators. I, of course, faced the problem of the leaks getting back to the supervisory or management personnel. The fact that it never did, or so I believe, could be fortuitous or that the workers realised the danger such leaks posed to my fieldwork.

As I noted above, I also faced the dilemma of subtle pressure of providing information to some management personnel on my research findings. The most pronounced case, which happened during my second month in Falomo, involved the IRU and the Union. The turmoil within the local unit of NUPENG looked like upsetting the delicate relationship that the IRU had struck with a faction of the Union (see Chapter 9). The high point of these 'destabilising' developments was at a union meeting, held after working hours in the staff canteen. The union leaders invited me to the meeting and allowed me to take notes undisturbed. I informed one of the senior IROs innocently, that I was going to attend the meeting. He then offered to give me a lift home after the meeting since, as he said, he was going to work late. Fortuitously, when I left for the meeting I took my bag with me. In the discussion with some union activists after the meeting, I forgot to go back to the

IRU office and left for home in public transport with the workers. It was the following morning that I realised that the IRO and the Unit's Head had waited for me to come back for a de-briefing on the union meeting; the offer of a lift home was just a ruse. When I left for Warri a couple of days later, I was acutely aware of how something might be demanded in return to all the access I was being allowed for documents and personnel. Given my personal opinion about the immensity of Management power against the workers and the Unions, I found snitching on the latter unacceptable.

A more difficult problem of responding to multiple demands was in the Refinery and it concerned the Union members. While in Falomo, opinions on the factions that had developed within NUPENG were less pronounced, in Warri the workers' opinions about the union and positions in the different factions were quite intense (see Chapter 10). However, I needed to have access to every faction and pockets of opinion. I faced the dilemma of retaining my access to the different individuals and still not offend the people with different opinions. I did not fully appreciate the dilemma until early September when someone asked me if it was true that I was seen with a particular Union leader. I said it was true but explained that because of the nature of my study and given the complexity of the union's history in the plant, I needed to get in touch with everyone and understand their points of view. I explained that this was regardless of what I thought of them. I presume my continuous emphasis on the fact that I was there to learn from them, and the personal, social relationship I developed with many people, made it easier to relate to the different pockets of opinions. The non-uniformity of opinion among the members of Shift B, for instance, also helped in reducing the problem of being seen to be in support of any one opinion group. Later on, I was usually asked for my opinions on union issues. While giving my honest opinions, I refused to pass judgment on what an individual or a faction was or did. With the union leaders, I tried to explain what I thought were the reasons for some of the grassroot anger or support, but always reiterated my position as an outsider and therefore not competent to offer firm advice.



### 1.3.2. Doing Interviews.

Interview was another qualitative method I employed during the fieldwork. This method had three broad formats, namely, (i) 'conversational interviews', (ii) group discussion and (iii) formal interview sessions.

In terms of retaining the natural context of the social relations, in or outside the workplace, the conversational interviews were the most ideal. Normally I would raise an issue and we would discuss the particular subject without the intrusion of a notebook or the tape recorder. The method falls into two broad types; the unarranged and the arranged conversational interviews. The former, as the name implies, occurred in unarranged, often fortuitous circumstances, when in the normal course of the day I would ask questions about particular issues and try to have a conversation on the issues. This method poses a problem for making records of the 'interview': because, it is purely conversational, I could not take out my notebook and jot down the conversation. In most circumstances I had to make mental notes of the exact words used and the pitch of the voices and as soon as I could, manage to jot it down in a piece of paper or the notebook. In the offices, this was easier since I could use the cover of taking notes from a file to scribble things down. In the plant however, it often meant dashing to the nearest toilet when I judged the time to be right. The limitation is of course that you could not go to the toilet every other hour without raising eye brows. It was only among the members of Shift B that I acquired enough confidence to ask if I could take notes.

The arranged conversational interviews involve fixing appointments with the interviewees who were mainly Supervisory or other Management persons. I realised in Falomo that taking notes during such interviews could be verbally frowned upon, I therefore stopped taking notes during most of such interviews. This 'natural' conversational facade had another advantage, i.e other persons could walk into the office and join the discussion which showed the complexity of the issues being discussed. However, I always carried my pocket notebooks with me in case someone wanted me to note what was said during the interview, as was twice the case.

The group discussion interviews are also similar to the conversational interviews in how they emerge and in how they are recorded; the main difference being the larger

number of people involved. The discussions were either unarranged or pre-arranged. Unlike ordinary discussions or arguments, a group discussion was often initiated by me. An example of such unarranged discussions, not consciously initiated by me, is the one on public transport and work which took place in Falomo. The advantage of the unarranged group discussion is the air of informality and the number of people involved. It also reveals the diverse and complex opinions expressed by the workers.

The arranged group discussion was something I was able to undertake with the process workers. On three occasions, the discussions were held during the night shift when supervisors were not in the plant. On the second and third occasions, I was able to take notes. Like the unarranged ones, the discussions were always joined by other workers.

The formal interviews, on the other hand involved the more traditional forms, i.e. taking notes or recording the interviews on tape. In either format, I would prepare the interview schedule beforehand and tried to follow the sequence of questions as I had planned it. The nature of such interviews like any conversations, is that they produce new leads which I pursued before returning to the prepared schedule. Most of the interviews involving taking of notes were conducted in the offices or the plant. Where Supervisory or Management persons are involved, their departmental roles and work organization were the usual subjects of discussion. For most times, information gathered during such interviews are the types one could get from the company brochure. However, as in the nature of conversations, and still more so in cases where I had established prior rapport with the interviewees, key comments about the complexity of relations -the usual 'what the PR brochure never tells you'- are let slip. Some of these are, I imagine, deliberate, while others were just in response to my questions and prompts. In the cases of the plant workers or union activists, the interviews were done only after a period of getting to know them and having a number of informal discussions with them. This procedure, plus my presence on the shopfloor, allowed me to break down the initial barriers of apprehension. The interviews never involved asking the supervisors for permission and most were held in places chosen by the interviewees; in the cloak room, the plant or a corner of the workshop.



The tape-recorded interview was the most formal type I conducted, and all such interviews were with officials of NUPENG, past and current, local and national. As with the other type of formal interview, the procedure for arranging, conducting and expanding the subjects of the interviews was similar. Unlike note-taking, and definitely conversational interviews however, they posed a lot of locational and procedural problems. On a very mundane level, the background noise of the plant was a repeated problem and having to change a tape, or checking if I was running out of tape space tended to raise the profile of the tape recorder. On two occasions the changing of the tape prompted the interviewees to call for adjournment.

On a more serious level, there are two main problems of taped interviews not evident in the other interview procedures. First, in a controversial situation, there is the legitimate fear of the interviewees of what might be done with the recorded interview. My first taped interview in the refinery, which was with one of the plant's NUPENG officials, illustrates this point. I had met him in the IRD office and had developed limited rapport with him. During one of the conversations we had and without any apparent reservation, he described an incident at a union delegates conference; two days later at the formal interview, I tried to get him to repeat the story, but he kept side-stepping the question. After the interview, he told me he knew what I wanted him to say but he would not say it on tape. It was later that I realised that the incident was crucial to a court proceeding still on at the time. I realised that winning the trust of the interviewee, before a taped session was crucial. I took that aspect of my earlier and very successful interview in Lagos for granted. I also learnt to make it clear to the interviewees, before the session, that if they wanted to say something which they did not want on tape they should tell me, so I could switch off the recorder. In three of my subsequent interviews that option was utilized.

The second major problem of the taped interviews is the patience required in order to avoid the interviewees feeling pressured. A two-and-half hour interview with a senior union official for instance, took four weeks to complete, and the final interview with the NUPENG General Secretary was completed only hours before I left Nigeria. In such extended interviews, I usually played the tapes to the interviewees, in my attempt to re-validate their cooperation. A number of the interviews were held in the plant or the

respondents' offices, but most were in their homes. Again, for the interviewees working in the corporation, the interviews were conducted without going through their bosses. In choosing those to be interviewed, I used the criteria of their strategic involvement in the union or specific events and knowledge of certain issues.

### 1.3.3. Documentary Sources.

The use of documentary sources was the third, non-quantitative research method I used. These sources can be grouped into two broad categories. First, the internal corporation documents, which include departmental files, internal communication papers and other documents which, unsolicited, ended up on my lap. The second broad category can be called public materials or materials in the 'public domain'. These include NNPC public relations materials, newsletters, journals and publications on oil production and sales and Warri Refinery Annual Reports. Newspapers and news magazines form the second segment of the public domain materials. I also made use of government publications like the reports of commissions of inquiries, gazettes and so on.

As I mentioned earlier, an advantage of working from within the various Industrial Relations offices in Falomo and Warri is the unlimited access to departmental files. These files deal with internal corporation communication or with the agencies of the State mainly -though not exclusively -on 'industrial relations' matters. There are, in addition, materials on communication with the Unions at different organizational levels. Access to these materials was however not unrestricted at the beginning. In Falomo for instance, the IROs with whom I shared an office wanted me to get the Unit Head's permission before using the files. It took me about two days to pluck up the courage to walk into the Unit Head's office and make the request, which he granted. In Warri, the Head of IRD, not the IRO, was the one who was initially reluctant to grant me access to the files. Even after that stage, I still needed the Head's permission since the file cabinets were in his office.

While I gained access to the file, I still faced a problem of the reliability of the information gathered through this source. I was warned early enough by an IRO, in Falomo that reports or minutes of meetings in the files are not infallible. Quite often it



is the 'processed' versions which stay in the files. An IRO who submits a report or the minutes of a meeting often does so both from an individual point of view and a departmental one. Such materials are passed to the Head of the Unit and the Personnel Manager and at each stage the reports are edited. This was usually in response to, and part, of the internal management politics; the IRU or IRD and most definitely the PSD, in Falomo, needed to demonstrate that its terrain -'industrial relations' and unions- was under control. I therefore had to supplement the reading of the files with asking the IROs in Falomo for the background information to an event or a report. This was easier because of the diversity of the 'politics' of the individual IROs; from the arch-managerialist to the liberal-radical. In Warri, on the other hand, the uniformity of disposition of the Head and the IRO meant there was no internal diversity of opinion on which to rely, and I found myself under pressure to accept the Management's account of events. Nevertheless, the departmental files were a mine of information, both in terms of information on things that happened before my field trip and the internal processes of the management and the unions. The historical information is one that a standard ethnographic study could not provide. The information of the internal processes provides a panoramic view of relations which the limited mobility of ethnography might not facilitate -e.g Board room discussion or top-level communication between the government and NNPC management.

Other materials were collected from the Personnel departments, in Falomo and Warri, the Medical Services, Fire & Safety and other departments in Warri. The libraries in Falomo and Warri also provided access to internal documents, e.g. minutes of meetings and memoranda at various stages of some construction projects in the Refinery. The restricted access to the Refinery's library, I believe, merits classifying the materials collected there as being outside the public domain. A very rewarding source of documentary materials was in form of unsolicited internal papers that were passed to me. As someone told me at the outset of the fieldwork, research, in such an environment, is only a glorified form of 'industrial espionage'.

#### 1.3.4. Conducting Questionnaire Surveys.

The surveys I conducted in the refinery, in terms of the relations between the methods, brought the research to a full circle. Shortly before arriving at Warwick I conducted a pilot survey in the Warri Refinery, using a 4-page questionnaire. The survey was undertaken without any experience of relations or nature of work within the plant. It was to highlight a number of issues which would serve as guides to my full-scale field research. The pilot survey, from the point of view of response, was a disaster. Only 82 of the 400 questionnaires were returned but I learnt a number of lessons. The project sensitized me to issues of sampling procedure, i.e reaching the respondents and the wording of a questionnaire. The survey also showed some trends which were followed-up using the ethnographic method. These include workers' perception of the Management, the Union and the expression of collective grievance.

I ran the survey in order to avoid the problem of systematic distortion of data which an ethnographic study is prone to. This is not the same as a researcher's empathic engagement with the research 'subjects' by which I stand (see below). On the contrary, because an intensive ethnographic study covers only a small proportion of the 'study population', a survey may show trends which the researcher is either not aware of or did not pay significant attention to. A survey can also illustrate the wider validity -or otherwise- of the ethnographic findings.

Two surveys were conducted, one of non-supervisory workers, the other of the supervisory personnel. The questionnaire used in the survey of the workers (Appendix A(i)) was designed in two stages. I left for the fieldwork with a draft, which was drawn up based on my pilot survey experience and from Cook et al (1981). However, I still had to deal with the wording of the questionnaire and its relevance for the workers. This was the second stage and it was accomplished by first re-focusing and updating the draft questionnaire as the fieldwork progressed, and second by working out the final draft with the workers in Shift B. I discussed the survey with the Area I Operators and explained that I needed their help, both in terms of relevance of the survey to their experiences and evaluation of how the wording of the questionnaire might affect the respondents.



We<sup>12</sup> spent about two hours on each of the three nights during a night shift at the end of September, discussing and amending the questionnaire. The forum was organized along the line of group discussion. The likely responses to some of the questions, were discussed and other issues and questions were suggested and debated. Most of these were included in the questionnaire and they include the effect of work on social and family lives, promotion, fear of victimization by supervisors and work hazards. A major contribution of this forum was that my attention was drawn to the negative impact of using the official hierarchy to distribute the questionnaires on workers giving 'honest' responses to the questions. I had suspected this as a problem since the pilot survey, but my explanation was speculative. Since my arrival in the refinery, I had also noticed the cynicism of the workers to questionnaires and I wanted to avoid the problem. It was the suggestion at the forum that convinced me that I had to alter the procedure for handing out questionnaires in order to elicit better uncoerced responses.

However, a problem of the forum was that we ended up with a large questionnaire, which after pruning down still left me with 82 'variables'. I had two options, either to run two separate surveys, using small questionnaires or one survey using all the 82 questions. The problems with the first option were. first, I could end up with two distinct samples, when what I needed was to examine the responses of the same set of individuals on a range of issues. Second, running two surveys was not time wise, expedient for me. In any case, the second survey would face the problem of the respondents feeling I was worrying them too often. The advantage of a short survey is of course that the attention span of the respondent would not be over-stretched. I opted for one survey using a large questionnaire and I resolved the problem of attention-span in a large questionnaire by using closed questions, with rating scales. A measure of flexibility was also built into the questionnaire by asking the respondents for their comments or explanations. The basis of a reliability test was also built into the questionnaire by repeating some questions, which are re-worded and separated by other questions.

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<sup>12</sup> About 25 workers from the three Process Areas and Fire & Safety department were involved in the discussions.

I used a number of sampling procedures. First the study population was defined as non-supervisory, shopfloor or office workers on or below salary grade of GL12. Although workers on GL13 and GL12 are 'senior staff' (see Chapter 6), I used the scales, as the cut-off point, because in Production and Maintenance departments, non-supervisory workers on those scales work on the shopfloor. Furthermore most workers on GL13 in Maintenance, for instance, are workers who had spent a considerable part of their working lives in the refinery as 'junior workers'. Anyone on GL11 and above, however, would most definitely be in a supervisory position. Having decided not to distribute the questionnaires through the supervisory personnel, it imposed a restriction on how widespread the survey could be. I therefore decided to sample the workers in Shifts A and B and day workers in the Refining Division.<sup>13</sup> Also marked as sampling targets were the workers in the Administration Block and the Plant Clinic. This purposive sampling procedure excluded the Security Guards, workers in the NNPC's housing complex -except the Estate Services unit-, the drivers and the Cleaning staff. The exclusion of the first two groups was deliberate while the last two was purely accidental.

Since the majority of Security Guards worked Shift and were deployed at the locations of the refinery's properties all over Warri, the only way I could distribute and collect the questionnaires was to go through their supervisors which would compromise the whole exercise, hence their exclusion. I also excluded those not working in the plant for the same reason of distribution and collection. The workers in the Refinery's Staff School did not fall into my defined study population. However the exclusion of the Cleaning Staff and the Drivers from the study population, was a result of the questionnaire itself. One thing that did not surface during the discussion forum was that a questionnaire presented in formal English posed problems for workers with limited formal education; the Cleaners and the Drivers were the groups of workers most affected by this. Although I gave out some questionnaires, I realised the problem in comprehension only when the first batch were collected. I therefore excluded these groups as well. Finally, although I gave out three questionnaires to some Security Guards, these were excluded since the Guards

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix D (i) for the Refinery's Organogram and Chapter 4 for a discussion of the chart.



were not polled as a group. The results discussed in the body of this study should therefore be read in the light of the restricted study population.

In distributing the questionnaire, I approached the workers myself in most cases. However in the Process plant, the Fire & Safety and Maintenance departments, I was assisted by some of the workers in giving out or retrieving the questionnaires. In such cases, I always followed up to make sure no-one was excluded. However, I faced the problem of my 'carefully' laid out sampling procedure being upset by either workers who flatly refused to accept the questionnaires or those who demanded to be surveyed although I did not plan to include their Shift or unit in the sample. To refuse the latter could compromise my informal relationship with them, and I judged that it was better to compromise the sampling procedure.

The survey was run between the third week of November and the first week in December, and out of about 400 questionnaires, 254 were returned or accepted as valid. With a study population of 949 people, the sample is 26.76% of the population and the response rate was 63.5%. Throughout this study, I have grouped the respondents under six departments, viz. Administration (or Admin.), which corresponds to the Division. The second group; 'Finance' embraces Finance & Accounts, Internal Audit and Purchasing departments. The 'Fire & Safety', 'Production' and 'Maintenance' correspond to the respective departments. 'Auxiliary' (Services) on the other hand include the Programming & Control, Technical Services and the Electronic Data Processing departments. Table 1.1, below, gives a breakdown of the respondents in the sample, in relation to the departmental distribution in the population.

**Table 1.1**  
**The Shopfloor Survey: Distribution of Respondents.**

Departments	% in Population	% in Sample
Administration	20.54	21.25
Finance	2.84	6.29
Fire & Safety	5.79	7.08
Auxiliary	7.90	10.23
Production	36.04	30.71
Maintenance	26.87	24.41

The divergence in population and sample proportions is due to the pattern of responses across departments. The more than two fold increase in the proportion of re-

sponses from Finance resulted from individuals who asked for the questionnaires, which I mentioned earlier. However I do not think it makes much difference to the representativeness of the sample since the difference in the case of Finance amounts to 5 persons. A more serious problem however is the proportion of 'junior' and 'senior' staff workers in the sample vis-a-vis their distribution in the population. Whereas Senior staff workers form 28.45% of the study population form 51.6% of the sample. The Junior staff workers, on the other hand, who are 71.54% of the population are only 48.4% of the sample. This was a definite sampling error which I became aware of only after the analysis of the returned questionnaire. While not excusing it, I feel it is difficult to eliminate the problem on the ground. For instance, while I could pre-select the sample on departmental basis, it is difficult to begin separating the junior workers from the senior workers on the shopfloor if the latter are not supervisory personnel. The misleading implication of this sampling mistake is rectified in three ways. First, most of my use of the data, deals with effects of work on the individual and perception of work relations, so that the junior/senior staff category is not too important. Second, where these categories are relevant I give the result in percentage of junior and senior staff. Finally, as should be emphasized in a study of work and production relations, survey results of social processes are at best illustrative of those processes. Survey results are even at their most precise form, only relevant for the time and place of data collection. This is not to demean surveys or excuse my sampling mistake, just to note that the survey is used in this study to illustrate and demonstrate the wider relevance of my ethnographic findings.

The second survey I conducted in the refinery, was among the Supervisory personnel, mainly Foremen, Supervisors and Superintendents or equivalent personnel. Heads of Department were included, only in so far as they perform the role of direct supervision. Both in drafting and distributing the questionnaires, this survey differs from that of shopfloor workers. First, I decided on the survey only in the middle of the fieldwork in response to some of the field findings and the need to examine their wider validity, and drafted the questionnaire (see Appendix D (ii)) based on those issues. Second, I decided to poll everyone in the study population because of its small size (188) and I used the hierarchy in this instance to distribute and retrieve the questionnaires. I made this last choice



because the survey dealt mainly with the supervisory personnel commenting on those under them or their relations with them, I did not therefore envisage that how the questionnaires are handed out has any serious bearing on the respondents. On a personal level, I did not find a repetition of the back-breaking experience of the workers' survey an attractive proposition.

I used the Refinery's internal telephone directory as the main sampling frame. This was supplemented by my knowledge of the distribution of the supervisory personnel and the information provided by the sectional or departmental heads. Although the study population is 188 only 167 were available in the refinery when the survey was conducted. Most of the 21 persons unavailable were on annual leave at the time, 102 questionnaires were returned, making the sample 54.25% of the population and a response rate of 61.07%. As in the case of the shopfloor workers' survey, the respondents in the Supervisors' survey are grouped along departmental lines. Table 1.2 below, shows the distribution in study population and in the sample.

Table 1.2  
Survey of Supervisors: Distribution of Respondents.

Department	% in Population.	% in Sample
Administration	26.06	17.64
Finance	4.78	2.94
Fire & Safety	4.78	6.86
Auxiliary	15.43	17.65
Production	18.08	22.54
Maintenance	30.85	32.35

The sample/population discrepancies are again due to the responses pattern of those polled, but have limited negative, effect on the survey result; the discrepancy in Administration for instance, involves 6 or 7 persons, and 1 or 2 people in Finance.

1.4. Methodological Issues in Field Research.

I have so far outlined both the development of the research problems and the methods employed during the field research. In this section, I note the implications -and lessons- of my fieldwork for ethnographic and survey methods. I argue that Amilcar Cabral's notion of the need for the African petty bourgeoisie to commit 'suicide as a class'(1980:136) is relevant for ethnography, especially the 'participant observation'

method. This is linked with the need to distinguish between 'work' and 'working on work'(Brown 1984). Finally I raise the problem of the neglect of the power (dominator/dominated) context of a workplace survey and the danger that this poses for reliability of survey results.

#### 1.4.1 Methodological Issues In Ethnography.

The essence of an ethnography as Malinowski notes is to grasp the research subjects' 'point(s) of view... to realize [their] vision of [their] world' (vide Spradley 1980:3, Burgess 1984:13, Kuper 1973); in McNeil's (1985:59) words 'to "get inside their heads" until it is possible to see their world as they do'. In other words, ethnography involves the (conceptual) simulation of the social experiences and conditions of those being researched. Some of the problems of getting 'inside the heads' of the researched have been recognized. Within main-stream Anthropology -which gave ethnography its intellectual credibility- the problems are defined in terms of 'eating strange foods, learning a new language' (Spradley 1980:3), a predominantly technical issue. The extent to which such ethnography was (and is) part of the imperialist venture, and its predominant racist paradigm is well documented<sup>14</sup>. The capacity of an ethnographer who is an element of the domination of the 'researched' to "tell it like it is" (McNeil 1985:55) remains suspect. The celebrated return of ethnography 'from coral garden to city street' (Burgess 1984, Ch.1) has been followed by the recognition of other difficulties. Gender, age and ethnicity are some of the identified problems of ethnography (Benson 1981:152, Hammersley & Atkinson 1983:Ch.4 and Burgess 1984:89-92). Given that most researches are, as McNeil (1985:11) notes, more about the poor and the powerless and the researchers are most often petty bourgeois (in descriptive terms), it is surprising that reflections on ethnography pay little attention to the class dimension. Cavendish (1982) is the one exception I am aware of.

In a post-colonial situation like Nigeria's, the class differences between the researcher and the research subjects are significant. For one thing, the 'indigenization' of research activities promotes a complacency which partly derives from the colonial an-

<sup>14</sup> See Onoge (1974, 1977), Hayter (1971:193-213), Glazer (1972), Kuper (1973) and Asad (1973) among others.



thropologist being supplanted by the indigenous ethnographer. The latter might share the linguistic, gender or 'cultural' characteristics of the researched which might becloud the class distinctions of the two sides to the research. This is not always a problem of the background of the researcher, which is what Cavendish (1982:5) points out in the context of Britain. The researcher could be of peasant, artisan or working class background, but the 'embourgeoisment' process involved in university education and career, and a researcher's petty bourgeois instincts, increasingly puts a gap between him/her and his/her 'background'.

In the context of national liberation, Cabral (1980) points out that the indigenous petty bourgeoisie -who become the inheritors of state power- have two distinct routes to follow. Either 'to give free rein to its natural tendencies to become "bourgeois"' or commit 'suicide as a class to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs' (p.136). This requires the petty bourgeoisie to recognise their class instinct, the gap between them and the people, and begin to combat it. In the context of an ethnographic study -of the poor and the powerless- the need for the petty bourgeois ethnographer to confront his/her class position, be continuously aware of one's class instincts, and attempt to overcome them, is not just a political statement, it is the imperative of ethnography. The essence of ethnography as Malinowski -the quintessential colonial anthropologist- notes, is to grasp the point of view of the research subjects and their relation to life, to realise their vision of their world (cited in Spradley 1980). But this involves more than gaining access to and acquiring the cultural artifacts of those being researched or for that matter symbolically interacting with them. 'Rather than studying people, ethnography', Spradley points out 'means learning from people' (1980:3). The recognition by the researcher of the class gap between him/her and the research subjects is only the beginning of getting into the latter's heads and telling it like it really is, from their points of view. This is not a recipe for uncritical emphatic engagement but emphatic engagement is the beginning of ethnographic wisdom.

This distinction ties in with another significant one, especially when 'participant observation' is the main research method. The researcher, in my own experience, has to

be aware of the distinction between his/her position as someone 'working on work' (Brown 1984). This became clear to me while I was in the Boilermakers Unit. I was in a work-gang assigned to a repair job in the FCC Unit. Most of my 'work' up till then, had not involved me in direct participation and here I was for the first time being directly involved in manual labour. It was while on this job that I first blistered my fingers, after hours of swinging hammers and pushing spanners. For me, the blisters generated a tremendous feeling of exhilaration, like a wildcatter striking oil for the first time. I looked around me and there were people sweating under the blazing tropical sun. It struck me as peculiar, they did not feel 'good' when they blister, no ecstatic mental punching of the air. A blister for them was pain, not the source of joy; they were stuck here and I was not. I was just someone on sabbatical, a passerby.

Although I was always aware of this distinction in fieldwork, its implications for ethnographic writing only struck me at that point. I had gone through the pain and anguish of Shift work and the pollution of the process areas not because I had to, but because I wanted to. Okay, so I needed it for a degree, but if I wanted I could skip a night shift, my livelihood did not depend on it. Significantly, those painful experiences were for me aspects of a creative endeavour. I was collecting data for a thesis, perhaps a book, the workers were not. For me pain was an aspect of creation, for most of them it was a world in which they are trapped. For many of the workers, 'the world' of work -in the words of Awoonor, the Ghanaian poet- 'is like a chameleon's faeces/ into which [they] have stepped/ and when [they] clean, it does not go.' The 'chameleon's faeces' was for me a matter of choice. The danger of my research becoming a story of my experience of work and work relations rather than the workers' experiences, is one that even at this stage I cannot say I have fully overcome. My use of verbatim quotes, in this study, is part of my effort to deal with this problem.

The problem of the distinction between work and working on work, in the context of 'participant observation' method, is not peculiarly mine. Cavendish (1982:7) for instance recognized this problem. While the academic teaching of 'participant observation' recognizes the outsider/insider (Spradley 1980:56) dichotomy, it is largely seen -and quite correctly- in terms of the advantage it offers the researcher. The fact that partici-



pating observers studying the workplace -either for political reasons (e.g Cavendish 1982) or for more academic reasons (e.g Burawoy 1979) or both (e.g Pfeffer 1979)- run the risk of substituting their experiences of (observing) work for the workers', is not one that is usually stressed. Still less mentioned, is that this problem may undermine the very category of 'participant observation'. This is in spite of the distinctions Junker (1960), Gold (1958) and Hammersley & Atkinson (1983:93) made between the various 'social roles for fieldwork', e.g. between 'complete participation', the 'participant as observer', the 'observer as participant' and the 'complete observer' (Junker 1960:63).<sup>15</sup>

#### 1.4.2. On Survey Method.

The experience of doing the questionnaire survey, also brought home to me a problem which I cannot remember being taught about. In spite of the highly sophisticated developments in questionnaire design, sampling procedure and survey administration, a point that sociologists often miss is the extent to which surveys are conducted within the context of power relations.<sup>16</sup> Hence the extent to which those administering surveys and their research instruments are either blind to or reproduce those relations of domination. Both were sharply brought home to me during the survey of shopfloor workers. I have mentioned the problems of going through the hierarchy in the plant to administer the survey, the exclusion of the Cleaning staff because many could not handle the formal English format of the questionnaire and finally the relevance of the instrument for the workers' experiences. Some of these could easily be corrected for the survey itself. The problem of language could be handled by using indigenous languages, -as in fact many surveys do- or orally administering the questionnaire (see Peil 1982).

But this leaves the central plank of the argument here untouched. When I started administering the questionnaires, I found two types of reaction. One was to me, as the administrator of the survey, and the survey itself. The other was about the danger of expressing opinions which could jeopardize the individual's livelihood. In the first case of reaction, I soon realised that many workers were cynical and sometimes angry about aca-

<sup>15</sup> Also cited in Hammersley & Atkinson (1983:93). Schatzman & Strauss (1973) outstanding book on field research -a life saver for me during the fieldwork- did not make the distinction either.

<sup>16</sup> One of the exceptions is Oakley (1981), see Roberts (1981).

demics and students who distribute papers to them to fill and then disappear. Many could not see how such surveys affected their conditions of working lives. As a Maintenance worker asked;

Na so so paper we dey see, wetin una dey tak'am do sef?. All we see are paper, what do you people do with them anyway?

This was a worker with whom I had become friendly, and who was helping me in administering the questionnaires. But what could I tell him?. So he gives me his honest opinion of what work and work relations means to him, so what?. In what ways would that necessarily deal with his condition of domination and the anguish that work sometimes mean to him and others. Many who were friendly with me and positively disposed to my research for a degree asked me to let their Management see the results of the survey, maybe things would change a little, for the better. But even if the Management received the results, would things really change?. The cynicism about survey in some sectors, boils over into anger. Twice I had people rejecting the questionnaires because -quite correctly- they feel that all that researchers do was exploit them, the workers, for whatever end the researcher wanted the survey results for. In my case, even if it leads to action, the primary requirement is a degree. I was already caught in the cesspool of the golden ladder that drips pus. I doubt if many who collected and filled the questionnaire were not just being polite to me or hoping I will put it to some redeeming use. There were times (after explaining and convincing people to accept the questionnaires) when I felt that selling poison, in its moral and salesperson implications, could not be that difficult after this. I doubt if this was just a peculiarity of a "third world" country, anyway' or of a green horn. Brown (1984:312) drew attention to Tony Elger's experience with skilled engineering workers in Sunderland (North East England). The implication of exploiting the 'research subjects' is ingrained in most research methods. Imperialist anthropology (ethnography) may be the most dramatic, but by no means the only, example.

On the other hand, the fears of the expression of opinions critical of the Supervision and Management that could be traced back to the individual, were voiced to me many times over during the survey. A typical one was expressed by a middle-aged Process workers thus;



Ol' boy, if 'a fill dis one so, naw  
be retirement be dat?

If I respond the way I really feel,  
mate, ain't I saying goodbye to my  
livelihood?

In a research method where reliability and validity are central issues in assessing survey results, it is curious that the implications of the context of domination for survey results is never the first thing you learn. In the context of employment relations, where livelihood is involved, the issue is more than just an idle political pre-occupation of a left-wing researcher, it is a methodological issue. I might have resolved some of these fears for many of the respondents both by my personal association with them, the non-use of the hierarchy to do the survey and so on. But most surveys hardly allow for such circumnavigation of the respondents' sources of fear. That most researches and researchers are part of the framework of domination is one that could not be slightly shrugged off.

#### 1.4.3. The Use of Pidgin English.

A different 'methodological issue' in this work is also a stylistic one and it concerns the use of pidgin english -the most widely used language of the shopfloor- in this study. As evident above, when a verbatim quote is in pidgin, I have preserved it in the original form. As I earlier mentioned, this is partly to minimise the problem of substituting my experience for the workers'. It is, of course, possible to do that without resorting to pidgin quotes, but there are more substantive reasons. The first is as much about the linguistic structure of pidgin as its earthy feeling. The language has developed over the past two centuries of trading contacts with, and colonial domination by, Britain. In Warri, it has become the lingua franca of ordinary people in the ordinary day's conversations. Although there are obvious english words, the linguistic structure of pidgin -the thought process- derives from the indigenous languages. In many instances therefore, its translation into formal English can be as difficult as in the case of the indigenous languages. To give a short example, the phrase: 'For where?' may involve two obvious english words, but it is more akin, in meaning, to the Hausa word; 'Ina?' or the Yoruba word 'Nbo?'. 'For where?' can only be translated by explaining that it may be used as a polite appreciation or response where the speaker was for instance told 'You guys are really enjoying' (in pidgin 'Una dey enjoy o').

Second, because one's first language or dialect is the easiest way of expressing one's feelings, the first language/dialect may capture strains and rhythms of emotion that a more formal second language may not. Not that pidgin is the mother-tongue of the workers, but for most who speak it, pidgin is the closest thing to a common language, learnt from infancy. It is this dimension of pidgin english that had made me retain the original quotes, while providing a translation on the right-hand side of the same page. A third element, relevant for the Warri Refinery workers and pidgin english is the question of vocabulary. The phrase: 'Na monkey dey work, baboon dey chop', (Monkeys do all the work, but the baboons do the eating) is often used to convey the experience of being exploited. But if used within the context of work relations, one cannot take it upon oneself to substitute 'workers' for 'monkeys' and 'capitalist' for 'baboons'. For one thing categories like 'capitalist' or 'proletariat' are not part of the workers' daily vocabulary, even when the message is the same. More significantly, in the context in which categories like 'capital', 'capitalism' are becoming the grazing grounds of academic eclecticism, the earthy pidgin categories retain their potency.

Finally, I have retained the pidgin originals because they are expressions of and evidence of what I see as creative cultural production among 'ordinary' working peoples, which need to be recognized. The language, like any other, expresses the earthy experiences and reflect the ecological contexts of those who speak it. In insisting on the language, as in the various indigenous language forms, one is only recognizing the creative contemplation that language-forms involve those who speak it and are continuously expanding its boundary. But pidgin is largely a spoken language not a written one, and it is only in the past decade that attempts have been made to turn it into a language of literary writings. I have adhered, throughout this work, to the phonetic-form of everyday conversation in Warri, so that although pidgin for 'I don't know' would be 'I no know', its phonetic-form is actually 'A naw know'. The pidgin originals are kept on the left side of the page and the (efforts at) English translations on the right side of the same page.



### 1.5. The Method of Abstraction.

In this section, I outline the method of abstraction which serves as the premise of this study, in terms of the procedure of analysis I employ. Although Marx is not the only one to talk of 'abstraction'<sup>17</sup>, two distinct issues mark his notion of abstraction from any other. One is philosophical, namely as Marx points out;

The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can... The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before... Hence, in the theoretical method, ...subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition. (Grundrisse, p.101-2)

In other words to 'recognize the necessary difference between the real objects of thought and the concepts' which are aspects of the real world appropriated in thought (Fine 1982:12-13, Clarke 1977, 1982). The second aspect of the method of abstraction is methodological; namely that we cannot just walk into a context of social relations and make sense of relations unfolding in front of us. 'Things', they say, 'aren't always what they seem', and as Fine & Harris (1979:6) note 'going behind superficial appearances is no simple task.' A method of inquiry, Marx points out in the Postface to the Second Edition of Capital I, 'has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented' (1976:102 emphasis mine), this is the process of 'discovering the rational kernel within the mystical shell' (1976:103). This process of abstraction involves two inter-connected aspects; one is referred to as 'levels of abstraction' (Mandel 1976:29-30, Braverman 1976:121, Clarke 1977:10-11, 1982:Ch.4; Fine & Harris 1979:6-8, Shaikh 1981:291, Fine 1982:12-18). The other is what Diane Elson (1979a:142-4) calls 'one-sided abstraction'.

The level of abstraction, the tracking down of the inner connection, involves 'starting from the complexity of the superficial world' (Fine & Harris 1979:6), or the 'chaotic conception of the whole' (Marx 1973:100). From this stage, one moves into the inner connections until one arrives at 'the simplest determinations' (Marx 1973:100) of the

<sup>17</sup> To avoid re-inventing the wheel, I should point out that there is nothing novel in my discussion of the method of abstraction. Others -some quoted here- outlined the key points which I am using for the current analysis.

process being investigated. Conceptually however, one has to retrace one's steps until one arrives again at the starting point. 'This time', Marx points out, the conceptual appropriation is 'not as a chaotic conception of the whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations' (ibid). The concepts of the inner-most, simplest 'determinations and relations' are referred to as 'the most simple, highly abstract concepts' (Fine & Harris 1979:6, Marx 1973:100-102). As we move down the levels of abstraction and take on-board the increasingly more complex nature of the issue being investigated, we develop 'increasingly more complex concepts... until the complexity of the world of appearances is reproduced in thought or on the page' (Fine & Harris 1979:7). This must be distinguished from speculative abstraction (Clarke 1977:11, Fine & Harris 1979:7, Fine 1982:13). As Marx (1973:105) notes, 'even the most abstract categories', are 'in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves... product[s] of historical relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.' The relationship between categories of the highest, and the lower levels of abstraction is not that the latter replaces the former. Since they are categories of different levels, the categories of the higher levels are 'reproduced... by the more complex concepts' (Fine 1982:13).

The other aspect of the method of abstraction is, as I noted above, what Elson calls 'one-sided abstraction', which Marx continually emphasized throughout Grundrisse and the 3 volumes of Capital. In dealing with a subject of inquiry, we can break it up into its constituent parts and investigate the different aspects, this stage, Elson (1979a:142) referred to as the 'phase of individuation'. However, after this phase of the 'dissection of the tendencies or aspects counter-posed in [a historical process], comes the phase of synthesis, of reconstitution of the appearances of the form, and of re-immersing it in process.'(emphases mine) The phase of synthesis does not simply recompose analysis, but takes us beyond it, helping 'to correct the one-sidedness intrinsic to the first phase'. So for instance when Marx analyzed the duality of the capitalist labour process, commodity or labour, by suspending one aspect to make sense of the other, at the same level of abstraction, he does not simply assert this or that aspect of the duality but reiterates at the phase of synthesis, that it is in their unity that we understand their specificity. The di-



alectical content of this method contrasts sharply with the Dependent/Independent Variables, uni-directional, procedure of bourgeois social science.

It is important to emphasize the unity of these two aspects of the method of abstraction. Marx's analysis of capitalism was undertaken within this framework. The distinct marks of capitalism, as Marx puts it (1981: 1019-20) are two. One, is that 'the dominant and determining character of its product is that it is a commodity'(p.1019). In this context, the worker also appears primarily as a bearer of a commodity; labour-power. The second distinct mark 'is the production of surplus-value as the direct object and decisive motive of production'(p.1020). The categories of Capital-Labour (-power), which depict the inner connections of capitalism, represent the highest level of abstraction. It is crucial to realize that in Marx's analysis, 'capital is not a thing, it is a definite social relation of production'; historically specific (1981:953). It is the social relations which give the means of production its distinct character; one cannot therefore talk of production as if it were a purely technical thing.

On the other hand, the labour-power of the worker, acquires its distinct status as a commodity essentially within the production relations. But as Marx points out, this is a peculiar commodity, unlike any other, it is bound up with the worker's 'mental and physical capabilities... the living personality' (1976:270). Furthermore labour-power 'has the peculiar property that its use is... the creation of new value' (1956:237)<sup>18</sup>. Although I do not intend a further discussion of Marx's conceptual categories at this stage, it is important to note that categories like capital, labour-power, labour, the circuits of productive, money or commodity capital, the spheres of production and circulation, value, exchange-value and surplus-value are not some esoteric jargons adopted for ornamental purposes.

As I pointed out earlier, Marx is not the only one to talk of abstraction. One of the grounds of criticism of Dunlop (1958), by Wood et al (1975), was in fact that he misunderstood the Parsonian project by putting the Industrial Relations System on the wrong 'logical plane' (p.297) and 'conflating the concrete and the analytical'(ibid). Dunlop himself referred to concepts of industrial relations system and the economic system as

<sup>18</sup> See Marx & Engels, Werke, Vol.6., which is also cited in Bekerman (1983:91).

'logical abstraction' (1958:6). But what is this 'abstraction' and how does it differ from Marx's method that I outlined above?. In modern bourgeois sociology Weber provides the methodological spring-head. Abstraction for him

involves first the production of... "imaginary constructs" by the disregarding of one or more of those elements of "reality" which are actually present, and by the mental construction of a course of events, which is altered through modification of one or more "conditions" [1949:173, emphases mine, cf. Huff (1984:15).]

It is important to emphasize that unlike Marx, for Weber -and the broad spectrum of bourgeois social science- abstraction starts in the head of the researcher. A significant element of this abstraction is what is referred to as 'ideal-types'. Huff (1984:8) discusses the premise of Weber's abstraction in terms of an agnostic approach to "reality", however as Clarke (1982:201) points out, 'for Weber... the ideal-type had no reality of its own, it was strictly a "Utopia", an heuristic device'. In more recent effort at rigorous theoretical formulation of Industrial Relations for instance, Heneman (1969) made a distinction between 'Conceptual systems' and 'Operational systems' (p.6 c.f Mills 1970); the latter 'are found in real life', the former are 'logical abstractions'. Like Weber's 'ideal types', they are mental constructs, and Theory is the link between "reality" and abstract categories or systems. It is the same distinction that Merton (1968 Ch.2) made when arguing for the vocation of 'middle-range theories'. It is crucial to emphasize the distinction between logical or speculative abstraction and Marx's method of abstraction. The latter starts in real social processes and has validity only in terms of those real situations. As Clarke (1982) and Fine (1982) -among others- point out, the effect of speculative abstraction is that bourgeois ideology is presented as science. The concept of rationality in Weberian sociology, for instance, is such that 'in its fullest development, it is characteristic only of a capitalist society.' (Clarke,208). Marginalist economics like modern sociology, starts from a perspective which denies the historical specificity of capitalism, reduces production to purely technical process and eternises the bourgeois society.

It is important to reiterate the reason for my elaboration of the method of abstraction (and the categories, that will come up at the end of Chapter 2). In Chapters 3 to 10, I will analyse different aspects of the research findings, each of these involve analysis



at the phase of individuation. In the concluding chapter, I will undertake a conceptual reconstitution of the research findings in the light of the preceding discussions. This will constitute the phase of synthesis. The discussions also involve issues of different levels of abstraction, and in this sense the categories of abstraction are vital instruments of analysis. The conceptual categories adopted in a thematic analysis of the 'empirical' findings are therefore not a case of obsession (or idle pre-occupation) with concepts. It is within this framework that I specify the research findings, and the Nigerian experience, and re-appraise Industrial Relations orthodoxy.

### Conclusion.

In the preceding pages, I have outlined the background to the development of my research problems. It is important to stress that although this study arose out of conceptual unease with main-stream Industrial Relations and goes on to deal with work and work relations from the perspective of production (labour) process and production relations, it remains primarily exploratory in its intentions. Understanding work relations within a context like Nigeria's remains my primary desire, although with a few implications for general theoretical endeavours. The method and categories of abstraction are vital to both ventures. Second, I have outlined the research methods employed for this study and a few implications for 'theory of method'. However, categories like interviewer/interviewee, researcher/research subjects should be treated with caution. The interviewer went through the fieldwork being interviewed himself, and the observer being observed. The notion of subjects of research would, apart from its condescending overtone, fail to highlight the extent to which many of the 'insights' that I express in this work were suggested or brought to my attention by the 'researched' themselves.

I do not pretend that this work is 'non-partisan'. When I opted for a Master's degree in 'Industrial and Labour Relations' instead of Sociology some years ago, the motivation was not purely academic. Nonetheless, understanding the world in order to change it, calls for intellectual (reflective) integrity.

## CHAPTER TWO.

### THE LABOUR PROCESS AND THE POLITICS OF PRODUCTION: a review of the literature.

#### Introduction.

At the end of my discussion of the research problems in Chapter 1, I noted that Braverman's work (1974) provides a basis for conceptualizing work and the analysis of Industrial Relations from the perspective of production. Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital (henceforth LMC) which draws on Marx's analysis of the labour process in Capital has become the basis for the current of analyses, in which the concept of 'labour process' is the distinct label. In this chapter, I undertake a review of this Labour Process literature. This discussion is undertaken in five parts. In section one, I outline the broad issues that Braverman was concerned with, this allows us both the basis for evaluating the subsequent 'Labour Process debate' (henceforth LPD). In sections two and three, I review the two main lines of development in the LPD, i.e. the discussions of 'Control' -in and of work performance- and worker 'Resistance', respectively.

In section four, I reflect on the contributions to the LPD which derive from studies in the 'Third World'. In the final section I provide some overall evaluation of the LPD and point in the direction of the contributions that this study hopes to make to the 'debate'. The emphasis in this review on Burawoy, apart from his major contributions to the LPD, is because of the relevance of his works to my own study. His, I believe, is the only contribution to span advanced and peripheral capitalist context.

#### 2.1. Braverman and the Labour Process: the setting of an agenda.

In understanding the contribution of Braverman's LMC and evaluating the works within the LPD, it is important to put the LMC in perspective. The origin of Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital, lies in his effort to understand the changes in 'the structure of the working class, and the manner in which it had changed' (1974:1). This initial venture led to an attempt to make sense of 'the incessant transformation of work in the modern era' (p.4), and finally to Marx's Capital (Vol.I); the latter for two main reasons.



First, the paucity of work within the marxist tradition, which dealt with the capitalist mode of production in the way Marx did (p.9). Second, within bourgeois intellectual tradition, social relations of production are presented as inevitable outcome of technical imperatives of production (pp. 12-17). The transformation of work and the changes in the structure of the working class is therefore explained as products of technological imperatives. Braverman found this explanation unacceptable, to the extent that it does not explain the historical specificity of capitalism.

It is important to understand that LMC was envisaged by Braverman as a contribution to Marxist scholarship (Braverman 1974, 1976; Sweezy 1980). More significant, is that following Marx, Braverman insists that under capitalism, 'technology, instead of simply producing social relations, is produced by social relations represented by capital' (p.20). Not just capital, but 'how the **commodity form**... matures into the form of capital, and how the **social form of capital**, driven to **incessant accumulation as the condition for its own existence**, completely transforms technology' (p.20)<sup>1</sup>. This is however, a 'historical process' (p.21). For Braverman therefore 'the labour process', -the relations within it, its restructuring, etc.- has to be seen first as a capitalist labour process, 'and the specific manner in which these are formed by capitalist property relations' (p.24).

This position derives from an analysis of the nature of Work (in-general), and the particular form that work takes under the conditions of capitalist production. First Braverman (1974, Ch.1) makes a distinction between 'labour' and 'labour power'. Following Marx (1976, Ch.7), Braverman specifying the distinctive characteristic of human labour (in-general) as purposeful productive activity, indeterminate in its application (1974:45-58). Human consciousness is what stamps human labour with this distinct characteristic and sets it apart from instinctive production activity among animals. However, 'the unity between the motive force of labor and the labor itself is not inviolable. The unity of conception and execution may be dissolved' (pp.50-1). The systematic dis-engagement of this unity, is for Braverman one of the distinct features of a capitalist labour process vis-a-

<sup>1</sup> For both quotes, italics are in the original text but the bold emphases are mine.

vis the pre-capitalist forms. The other is the form that the capacity to labour, i.e. 'labour power' takes under capitalism.

In addition to the separation of the worker from the means of production, the worker enters the arena of production as a seller of a commodity; labour power (1974:52). Commodification of labour power is therefore an element of the 'commodity form' mentioned above. It is the incessant accumulation inherent in capitalist production which Braverman sees as the basis of both the forms of the direction of the labour process and the dis-engagement of the unity of the labour process as a necessary unity of conception and execution: the design and carrying-out of work. The organization of work, as evident in scientific management for instance, proceeds 'not from the human point of view but from the capitalist point of view' (1974:86). Sociologists on the other hand investigate work not from the human perspective per se, but from the perspective of capital and the habituation of workers to the condition and environment of extraction of surplus-value (labour) and capitalist accumulation. It is within this context that Braverman defined Taylorism as 'nothing less than the explicit verbalization of the capitalist mode of production' (ibid). To see Taylorism only in terms of the outmoded stop-watch timing of work or assume it has been superseded by "human relations" or other currents of industrial psychology is to miss what both are about. It would 'represent a woeful misreading of the dynamics of the development of management' (1974:87).

It is on the basis of this discussion that Braverman talks of the 'degradation of work' under capitalism. Any extension of Braverman's work must therefore begin from the understanding of the specificity of capitalist production; in other words, its immanent tendency as accumulation and expansion of capital (the valorization process), the commodity character of production and the labour-power, etc. Perhaps more significant is that Braverman's analysis conceived of capitalism in a societal sense; a social relations of production and reproduction of social life. This is crucial for understanding the structure of LMC itself and the links between the different sections of it, from the 'Introduction' to Part V. Crucial to the expansion of Braverman's work is an understanding of the method of abstraction, which though implicit in LMC, was made explicit in his 'Two Comments' (1976:121-2).



## 2.2. Control or Consent: a survey.

The reaction to Braverman has been varied, but two basic thrust emerge. Those of the 'Weberian tradition' interpret Braverman (1974) as a 'contribution to sociological thinking' (Littler 1982:25), whose 'major contribution was to smash through the academic barriers and offer a potential for the birth of a new, integrated approach to the study and history of work' (p.26 cf. Littler & Salaman 1982:251). For those of marxists persuasion, it brought back to the centre of discourse the 'ultimate material basis of politics in the capitalist mode of production' (BLPG 1977:3) and a thousand flowers did bloom. One area in which the 'post-Braverman' LPD literature has blossomed, and relevant to this study has been in the discussion of 'Control', 'Consent', and 'Resistance', and most of the discussion derive from the works of Andrew Friedman, Richard Edwards and Michael Burawoy. It is the works of these contributors to the LPD that I now use as a guide to the LPD literature. It is important to stress that although, for purpose of simplification, I am separating the discussion of 'Control' from that of 'Resistance', in the works of Friedman and Edwards the two issues are bound together.

### 2.2.1. Friedman: Responsible Autonomy & Direct Control.

Friedman's (1977) work is the first 'post-Braverman' attempt to specify forms of labour control. For Friedman, the discussion of control derives from his understanding that what the worker sells 'for a fixed period of time... [is] his capacity to work over a period of time for money, and for some degree of hardship during that period of time' (1977:266). As he notes (1977:77);

labour power is peculiar in that it is possible for labour power to create more value in the labour process than it costs to produce that labour power. When the capitalist buys labour power he buys the possibility of exploitation, because whatever is produced in the labour process legally belongs to the capitalist. Also, legally, the capitalist controls what the worker does in the labour process, within broad socially defined limits.

The propelling force is the 'avarice' of the capitalist and competition (p.77). Under capitalism management involves 'two different but closely related functions'; coordination of materials, financial matters, sales, etc. And 'the exercise of authority over workers'; the latter 'peculiar to... class-divided societies (p.77).

Friedman defines 'control' by making a distinction between 'absolute' and 'relative' control, in the sense of ability to 'exercise restraint or direction upon the action of a force or thing....[i.e] productive activity' (p.83). There are 'two major types of strategies which top management use to exercise authority over labour power, viz., 'Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control' (p.78). 'Responsible autonomy' is defined as;

attempts to harness the adaptability of labour power by giving workers leeway and encouraging them to adapt to changing situations in a manner beneficial to the firm. To do this top managers give workers status, authority and responsibility... try to win their loyalty, and co-opt their organizations to the firm's ideals (that is, the competitive struggle) ideologically. (p.78)

Direct Control, on the other hand

tries to limit the scope for labour power to vary by coercive threats, close supervision and minimizing individual worker's responsibility. (ibid)

These two strategies have been characteristic of the organization of the labour process throughout the history of capitalism. Subcontracting in early capitalism is an example of responsible autonomy. In addition the segmentation of the labour force within the firm had always existed; skilled workers getting doses of responsible autonomy while unskilled workers face direct control (1977:Ch.7). Over time however, the media of 'direct control' do alter; factory discipline, 'Taylorism', 'flow production', etc. The problem for management is that these media provoke worker resistance.

Responsible autonomy in the past century, is partly derivative of the development of industrial relations procedure, which 'is an indirect means for maintaining managerial authority' (p.96). It grew also as a reaction to workers' resistance to 'direct control' in the 1920s and 1930s, to the 'drying-up' of the active reserve army' of labour and the boom in the product market (p.99). The rise of the Human Relations school and the Tavistock Institute in propagating responsible autonomy is primarily the articulation of 'an alternative managerial strategy' (pp.99-101), 'to combat some of the undesirable effects of Direct Control strategy' (p.101). In either case, Friedman stresses that they are impossible as ideals, each has its contradictions with implications for the profit margin. Although managements can move in either direction, switching from one strategy to the other is also not easy because of the cost of job redesign.



The solution devised by top management is splitting the labour force into 'core workers' and 'peripheral workers', and applying responsible autonomy to the former and direct control to the latter. The defining line for core workers is either their centrality to the exercise of managerial 'authority' or their capacity to resist management (Ch.8). The peripheral workers are largely unorganized workers: women, immigrant or ethnic minority workers.

As Edwards (1986a:Ch.1) points out, Friedman's 'approach has a good deal to commend it' in relating control to the dynamics of workers' resistance. At this stage however, it is in its contribution to our understanding of issues of 'control' or 'consent' that I am interested.

Wood & Kelly (1982) have noted that there is a lot of imprecision in Friedman's categories. Responsible autonomy, as Edwards (1986a:36) notes, 'covers a whole range of techniques, which may appear together but which need not do so', so does direct Control. It is a problem equating Kamata's (1982) experience of 'direct control' in the Toyota plant with Burawoy's in the 'Allied' machining shop, for instance. As Edwards (1986a) also notes, variations within and a combination of different control stratagem are conceivable.<sup>2</sup> Nichols & Beynon's (1977) report of job enrichment' scheme at ICI show for instance, that giving workers 'responsible autonomy' does not preclude the application of 'direct control'. The testimony of the worker who felt more 'knackered' than 'enriched' (p.16) points to the weakness in equating strategic manipulation of the workers with autonomy, responsible or otherwise, just because top managers say so (c.f Nichols & Beynon 1977:Ch.7, Braverman 1974:Ch.6, Beynon 1984:Ch.1). In addition, Friedman treats managerial 'authority' as largely unproblematic, and at best in incremental terms. By treating Management in predominantly functional terms, 'control' is seen as necessarily (and consciously) activated by the Management. Hyman (1980a:305) for instance notes that 'the capitalist mode of production involves a built-in compulsion, remote from deliberate human control', for valorization and accumulation. A conceptual pre-requisite is the appre-

<sup>2</sup> Although Friedman treat 'responsible autonomy' and 'direct control' as 'two alternative strategies' (1977b:47) he suggests, at a recent conference, that they could be seen as two ends of a continuum.

ciation of what Marx calls 'the real subsumption of labour under capital' (1976:1019-38) and this is missing from the Friedman's schema. (See section 5, for further discussion.)

Finally, with the activation of the control strategies one wonders if 'responsible autonomy' is not just a question of management dilemma with organized sections on specific issues. Is it the fact of the strength of workers organization, vis-a-vis the unorganized section (peripheral) that makes management less willing to handle them as they would 'peripheral' workers rather a strategy of management to 'responsibly autonomize'(!) them?

### 2.2.2. Edwards: From Simple to Bureaucratic Control.

Richard Edwards (1979) working from a similar conceptual background as Friedman, suggests three types of control, namely 'simple', 'technical' and 'bureaucratic' control. Unlike Friedman he periodizes capitalism in terms of these control strategies. Each phase involves a dominant form of labour control. The small size of firms in the early stages of capitalism, along with 'the geographical concentration of the firm's operations' (1979:25), enhanced 'the personal power and authority of the capitalist [which] constituted the primary mechanism for control' (ibid);

He supervised the work activities directly; he maintained a close watch on his foremen; and he interceded immediately with full power to solve any problems, overriding established procedures, firing recalcitrant workers, recruiting new ones, rearranging work schedules, reducing pay, handing out bonuses, and so forth. (1979:25)

However with the expansion of firms, 'the method of control came into conflict with the requirements of production' (p.30), the solution devised was 'hierarchical control'. The hierarchy of 'bosses', the lower tier answerable to the upper tier, created 'the foreman's empire', a devolution of the powers previously exercised by the capitalist to the foremen (1979:30-4). 'Simple' control has its root in the size of the firms, hence its persistence in the small business sector of the economy.

The rise of 'big business' (monopoly capital) 'produced larger workforces inside the firms', accentuating the contradiction of 'hierarchical' control. A proliferation of hierarchy and the rise of professional managers occurred simultaneously with the expansion, but it could not contain 'the crisis on the shop floor [because of]... the larger social con-



text in which it appeared' (p.55). The dictatorial powers of the foremen unleashed, within this new context a new wave of resistance; 'sabotage, physical threats to exceptionally tyrannical foremen, appeals to higher bosses, and collective (if informal) understanding about work pace'(p.53). The 'conundrum' faced by corporate capitalism was that in spite of their enormous resources (financial, paramilitary etc) 'their workers increasingly challenged their control' (p.90).

In the short term, corporate capital used its financial resources to undermine workers' resistance, while the first world War provided the emergent monopoly capitalist firms a respite, by 'destroying the line-up of political forces' (p.68). But long term solution to shopfloor crisis had to be found; experimentation with different forms of control therefore began (Ch.6). 'Welfare capitalism, scientific management, 'Taylorism' were tried without 'any attempt to reorganize existing power relations at the workplace' at this stage (ibid).<sup>3</sup> The stability that was later achieved, came through the "'structural control" of the work activities themselves' (p.109), but in experimenting with different earlier forms, big business had learnt some of the lessons (1979:110);

that control must emanate from a legitimate overall structure, that it must be concerned with the work itself, that jobs must be defined precisely on the basis of management's control over a special knowledge, that there must be positive rewards for proper work, and that management itself, especially foremen, must be subjected to systematic control... These lessons constituted the agenda for structural control'.

However, while it is possible with the benefit of hind-sight to compile the list, 'no corporate leader was convinced or even conscious of all the entries' (p.110). In any case, 'technical control' emerged as 'the control mechanism embedded in the technological structure of the firm' (p.110). It 'involves designing machinery and planning flow of work to minimize the problem of transforming labor-power, as well as to maximize the purely physical based possibilities for achieving efficiencies' (p.112). Here the capitalist class nature of production is coordinated with technology; this for Edwards, is the social dimension of technical control.

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<sup>3</sup> Edwards develops this argument against Braverman whom he thought saw scientific management as 'an enormous breakthrough in the history of work relations'! (1979:97).

Although Edwards gave Ford Motors as an example of technical control at work, it is the continuous-flow system, 'permitting them, rather than their workers, to establish the pace of the work' (p.113) that distinguished it from other, preceding, types of assembly line. The more modern form of technical control relies on the computer. The 'new technology has extended the potential for management control, faster than employers have been able to utilize it... giv[ing] a giant boost to the earlier methods of technical control' (p.124). The Production process is exceedingly more flexible with workers' activities and productivity subjected to greater surveillance and direction (p.125).

Technical control, however created its own crisis. As 'an all-round adjustor and equalizer' (Chs 7 & 8), it tended to homogenize the workforce, and with a stick far greater than the carrot, provoked workers' resistance. It was resolving this contradiction in the post-1945 period that led to the formalization of the second type of structured control; 'bureaucratic control', 'embedded in the social and organizational structure of the firm and built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedure, discipline, wage scales, definition of responsibility, and the like.' (p.131). Unlike technical control, once goals and structure were set, 'the management process was to proceed without need of, and (except in exceptional circumstances) without the benefit of, the conscious intervention or the personal power of foremen, supervisors, or capitalist' (p.131);

The foreman's role in the production process became one of merely enforcing a pre-structured flow of work activities. Rather than being exercised openly by the foreman or supervisor, power was made invisible in the structure of work. Thus structural control became the modern-day manifestation of a more ancient but enduring capitalist phenomenon, the yoking of alienated labor to the pursuit of profits. (p.110)<sup>4</sup>

The IBM and Polaroid cases that Edwards uses suggest that the existence of 'bureaucratic control' usually involves a non-union situation (although not essential to it) or a way of avoiding unionization (1979:Ch.8). It also involves a rule-based process of eliciting cooperation but with enough gold-plated knuckles to enforce compliance. This usually means an elaborate internal labour market, quite totalitarian in its control of the worker's total behaviour. (pp.130-50). and the creation of a company citizenship mentality in the workforce.

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards treats the Foreman as an unambiguous agent of capital.



The erection of structural, especially bureaucratic control, results in not just hierarchy of privileges within the firm, but segmentation of the labour market ('macro' or 'external'), into 'secondary', 'subordinate primary' and 'independent primary' labour markets. The secondary market 'is the preserve of casual labor [typified by]... the lack of any worker rights or elaborate employer-imposed work structures' (p.167). The other two share 'the characteristics of offering well-defined occupations, with established paths of advancement' (p.171). The subordinate primary jobs are unionised, vis-a-vis secondary market job, but usually routinized and subject to machine pacing vis-a-vis independent primary jobs. This has had the effect of fragmenting the working class and setting each fraction in opposition to the others. The idea of common workers' interest seems, therefore, to have disappeared (Ch.10).

Taken together Friedman's and Edwards's schemata have obvious similarities although the latter is the more sophisticated schema. However Edwards's bureaucratic control goes beyond Friedman's responsible autonomy in at least specifying that it involves a combination of coercion and cooperation. In highlighting the structuring of workers' behaviour, Edwards treats this situation as problematic, even if his own position is quite pessimistic. As Wardell (1986:25) points out, Edwards does not recognize 'that in constructing performance norms for units of labor power' potential arenas of struggle are constructed. The periodized account of control has been called into question by Geller (1979), Diamond (1979) Burawoy (1981), Thompson (1983:125), Edwards (1983, 1986a) and Wardell (1986), among others. While the different types of control are presented as historically successive, the subsequent types tend to develop in companies, even industries, other than where the previous one occurred. (Diamond 1979; Burawoy 1981).

But there are more serious queries. Geller (1979:40-1) points out that in Ford Motors for example all the three methods were in simultaneous use (see Braverman 1974:146-50).<sup>5</sup> Diamond also (1979:50) notes that for most 'low-paid clerical workers, for whom production quotas and work pace are more easily controlled by the clock, there would seem to be little difference between "rules orientation" [an aspect of 'bureaucratic

<sup>5</sup> Few, if any, of Braverman's critics -for 'neglecting' the 'subjective' factor- acknowledge the subtlety with which he analyzed the developments in Ford Motors up till 1925. Fewer still have matched that style.

control'] and most aspects of the earlier simple control'. It would be naive also to assume that with the erection of bureaucratic control -with its elaborate rules- the coercive power of personnel superintendence as represented by the foreman disappears. Edwards also tends to assume that control or compliance is achieved only at the point of production. Both Friedman and Edwards treat control and consent as mutually exclusive. A more fundamental critique of typology -which would also apply to Burawoy- is, as P. K Edwards (1983:31) notes, that the;

problems... are not simply empirical matters, to be resolved through refining the ideal-types... A typological approach is simultaneously unable to grasp the complexities of the real world or to provide a theoretically grounded set of categories.

### 2.2.3. Burawoy: Control by Consent.

Burawoy's analysis takes a line distinct from that of either Friedman or Edwards. For him the issue is not simply marking out of the strategies of control. His analysis derives from his reading of the shopfloor situation at 'Allied'<sup>6</sup>, where he thought there 'was an excessive expenditure of effort and ingenuity.' (p.xi) The questions were; 'Why do workers work as hard as they do?'.(1979:xi). Why [he, himself] was actively participating in the intensification of [his] own exploitation and even losing [his] temper when [he] couldn't' (p.xi). This of course contrasts with Plant sociologists' account of workers not working hard enough. For Burawoy, neither could Marx explain this active collusion of workers in their own exploitation, since Marx answer is the coercion of workers. Given the development of unions, employee rights, etc., coercion cannot explain his experience at 'Allied'; the problem, for him was not control, but consent. Burawoy's theorization of 'consent' derives from his reading of Banaji's (1977) theorization of the feudal production relation, which is then contrasted with the case under capitalism (Burawoy 1979:21).<sup>7</sup>

In contrasting feudalism with capitalism, five distinct features of the latter were outlined. First, unlike feudalism the distinction between necessary and surplus labour are

<sup>6</sup> This is the pseudonym for the South Chicago machine-tooling plant where Burawoy did his fieldwork

<sup>7</sup> This theorization of feudal production relation rests on speculative abstraction since it 'does not correspond to any historically concrete' form (Burawoy 1979:21).



not visible or explicit (Burawoy 1978:260, 1985:31). Second, the separation of the direct producer from the means of production, hence (and third) since 'workers cannot set means of production in motion by themselves', the workers 'are subordinate to and largely controlled by the labour process' (ibid). Fourth, unlike serfs there is no specified limit on the surplus to be produced by workers, and finally the need to survive rather than compulsion is the key factor to workers' appearance at the factory gate (ibid). The lack of distinction -spatial or temporal- between necessary and surplus labour means the capitalist is never sure if surplus value has actually been extracted. 'The dilemma of capitalist control is thus to secure surplus value while at the same time keeping it hidden' (1985:32). This dilemma becomes the principal issue in capitalist labour process.

### The Three Moments of Work.

Burawoy however resolves this dilemma by outlining the three moments of production or work (1978:266, 1985:35). These are 'the economic, political, and ideological moments in [or 'realm' of] work' (1978:266-76, 1981:90-100, 1985:35-40). This is in opposition to what he calls Braverman's 'inadequate' treatment of work relations, i.e. Braverman's severance of the 'subjective' from the 'objective' dimensions of work. Burawoy explains that the 'three dimensions are inseparable' (1978:274, 1985:39). The economic as production of things, the political as the 'production of social relations' and the ideological as the 'production of an experience of those relations' (1985:39).

The 'economic moment' of production is defined in terms of the labour process, which is composed of two 'inseparable components -a relational [social] and a practical [technical] aspect' (1979:15, c.f 1978:291).<sup>8</sup> These two aspects form what he calls 'relations in production', which is explicitly distinguished from the 'relations of production' (1978:291, 1979:15, 1985:13). The relations in production include relations among workers and between them and the management: the relational (1978:291), and the 'set of activi-

<sup>8</sup> There are ambiguities in Burawoy's use of the category of 'labour process'. Sometimes it is defined as the relational aspect of production: the 'relation in production' (1981:84, 1985:13-14,29). At other times the labour process is 'the economic moment of production [distinct from] the apparatuses of production' (1985:253). The problem is that if the 'economic' is distinct from the other moments the 'political' stops being a 'relational' aspect of production.!

ties that transform raw materials into useful objects': the technical (1979:15). The relations of production as the relations between labour and capital are the 'relations of exploitation' (1985:13). The political and the ideological moments are the processes of reproduction of the economic moment (1979:16). As I explain in Section 3, it is on the basis of the analysis of the political moment of production that Burawoy develops the category of the 'politics of production'. For the moment however we should concentrate on the ideological moment by which he explains the capitalist control of work and workers by 'consent'.

### Explaining Consent.

It is for his elucidation of the 'ideological moment' of work, that Burawoy is most famous. Contrary to the main thrust of argument in the LPD, he asserts that in the process of production, workers not only engage in production of things but in their own domination as well (1979, 1978:270-276, 1985:32-40). The 'capitalist hegemony' is materially based in production itself. As pointed out earlier a distinct characteristic of capitalism is the fact that the workers' survival rests on the profit margin of the employing firm: the 'proletarian existence rests not merely on today's wage, but on tomorrow's, the next day's and so on... capitalist laborers depend on the production of profit' (1978:265). This is the 'materialist basis of capitalist hegemony, according to which the interests of capital are presented as the interest, both present and future, of all' (1978:265). Hence 'consent is expressed through, and is the result of, the organization of activities' (1979:27), at the point of production. The work process is set up in such a way that the workers feel they have 'real choices, however narrowly confined those choices might be [and] it is participation in the choosing that generates consent' (1979:27). Burawoy uses the piece-rate payment system at 'Allied' and the organization of 'making out' among the workers to illustrate this position.

A specified number of pieces are expected to be produced per hour, which is taken as 100% -and forms the bench mark- but an upper limit of 140% is also set. Making out involves producing above 100%. Bonus is paid for the percentage of output above the bench mark. The whole shopfloor culture and pattern of relations, according to Burawoy



is organized around 'making out' and it involves the different grades of workers. The process of making out is classified by Burawoy as a 'game' in that while machine operators may produce above the 140% upper limit, they usually turn-in only 140%. Saving the remaining for other jobs or other days when making out is difficult is called 'building a kitty' or chiseling. This involves the operators developing new methods of achieving the upper limit on their own initiative. On the other hand, since there is a guaranteed pay, equivalent to the 100% bench mark, if making out proves too difficult, workers may simply stop trying; this is referred to as 'gold bricking'. This 'culture of the shopfloor' involves everyone: from the foremen who 'indulge' their operators, crib attendants, truck drivers, set-up men, inspectors, etc., who cut corners for the operators.

For Burawoy the important thing is that the organization of work promotes individualism and engenders horizontal hostility within the work force (1979:Ch.4). More significant, is the constitution of making out as a game (1979,ch.5). He is adamant that 'monetary incentive' is not the motive, even when making out is 'couched in the idiom of economic gain' (1979:84, emphasis in original). The 'uncertainties and crises' generated by the expenditure of effort serve as the challenge to the workers and legitimize the organization of work. Making out constituted as a game, actively coordinates the interests of workers and the company. For the company, profit, and for the workers, psychological and 'physiological' rewards (1979:89);

When one is trying to make out, time passes more quickly -in fact, too quickly- and one is less aware of being tired. The difference between making out and not making out was thus not measured in the few pennies of bonus we earned but in our prestige, sense of accomplishment, and pride.

This is the ideological moment or realm of the reproduction of the economic moment, since it also fulfills the role of making the generation of surplus value obscure to the worker. Contrary to the arguments that 'games' as the restriction of output and power struggle subvert managerial objective or indicate worker resistance (Crozier 1964, Homans 1955, Castoriadis 1976-77, O'Connor 1973), Burawoy re-addresses Baldamus' (1961) argument of workers' adaptation to work, in Marcuse's (1964) terms. The 'game' of making out is "'the voluntary servitude" of workers to capital' (1979:73). The 'voluntary servitude' is consent.(1979:81). As he explains (1978:272);

The very act of playing a game produces and reproduces consent to the rules and to the desirability of certain outcomes. Thus, one cannot play chess and at the same time question the rules and the objectives. Playing the game generates the legitimacy of the conditions that define its rules and objectives.

Although the initial establishment of the game, its rules and objectives could be subject to struggle, once established, management becomes the organizing and moderating force and facilitates the conduct of the process, from shopfloor management upward (1978:272-4; 1985:38-40). In spite of the evidence in his narrative, Burawoy treats foremen, supervisors -what he calls shop management- as the unmitigated agents of Capital. Following Gouldner (1954), indulgence is only a means of greasing the engine. They, as Edwards presents them, are seen as mere objects of capitalism.

The combination of this and the 'lateral conflict endemic to the organization of work' (1979:66) gives an insight into the dynamics of intra-working class fragmentation at the point of production. This fragmentation and lateral conflict, and the coordination of interests of capital as a collective interest, are further accentuated by the operations of the ILM. The hoarding of knowledge by experienced operators, who are supposed to 'break-in' the new operators (1979:Ch.6, 1985:Ch.4), the promotion and the seniority systems of managing redundancy, the pension scheme, etc., promote individualism (1979:106-7, 1985:133-4). In addition, it 'dissolves some of the tensions between worker and management and generates new tensions among workers... [and] concretely coordinates the interest of capitalist and laborer in the generation of surplus value' (1979:107). The Internal state, or the 'political moment' of the factory regime, replicates the same via the operations of collective bargaining (See Section 3).

Although Burawoy's discussion of the politics of production is bound-up with the discussion of consent, I will for the moment suspend the 'political' aspect until section 3. Suffice -for now- to say that the control/coercion balance which generates consent as in the case discussed above is what he calls the hegemonic type, which also reflects the monopoly capitalist character of the enterprise. The balance of coercion and consent, coupled with the form of the intervention of the State, underscore the typology of the politics of production [factory regimes], that Burawoy develops (1985:139). The scenario



that Burawoy creates is therefore more complex than either of Friedman or Edwards and the issue is not posed in terms of control or consent, but in the way the production of consent is essentially interwoven with and serves as the basis of control and locating consent in the production process itself.

However, there are a number of problems in Burawoy's schema. Take for instance the relation between the labour process and 'society' at large in both the material and ideological reproduction of the workers. As Thompson (1983:171-2) notes, the evidence for measuring worker consciousness is the flimsy and thin correlation of 'output' level with variables like age, sex, race, etc (Burawoy 1979:Ch.9). Even on Burawoy's admission it is inconclusive. As Aumeeruddy et al (1978) have noted there is nothing spontaneous about the 'confrontation of exchangers with one another' (p.48). The production of the 'bearer of labour-power' is not a phenomenon that occurs at the point of production. The individual capitalist can neither 'ensure from within this field [of value production] that the potential workers would be adequate to the requirements of the labour process' (p.48), nor the reproduction of the bearer of labour power from day-to-day. The Brighton Group (1977:24) also note the relation of production 'is reproduced within the social formation as a whole'. Even when Burawoy develops the typology of factory regime, this issue is virtually taken for granted. The intervention of the state is only to the extent that it determines the form of factory regime.

The very premise of asserting consent has also been challenged. A central aspect of this is the undialectical perspective of all the issues he sees as necessarily involved in generating consent. Clawson & Fantasia (1983:676) note;

Over and over again, Burawoy takes some feature of the workplace which had generally been identified as evidence of workers' progressive potential, and argues that it actually serves to reinforce the system. He does not seem to understand that a phenomenon can do both things at the same time, that something can be itself and its opposite. In other words, Burawoy's Marxist argument lacks a dialectical analysis.

This applies to nearly all aspects of the production process and relations he focuses upon. His central concept of consent or hegemony suffers most from this mechanistic approach. As Thompson (1983:176) points out 'by defining all co-operation in production as consent, then workers' adaptation to work can only appear as consent to its

rules'. As a derivative of Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Clawson & Fantasia 1983:675), Burawoy fails to appreciate the 'limits to and problematic character of this control', something 'imprecise and always open to renegotiation' (Hyman 1980b:315). 'For Gramsci', Hall et al (1977:68) note, 'there is no state or moment of "hegemony" which is not contested'. By far the most serious is the way all contention within the workplace are seen as 'only reproducing and realizing the structure' (Gartman 1983:662). The problems in Burawoy's distinction of relations in, and of production (and what I call the 'mis-reading' of Marx), will be discussed further, in section 5. Suffice to say that the distinction derives from Weberian sociological discussion of work, not Marx's and has serious implications for his overall analysis.

#### 2.2.4. The Labour Process Fall-Out: Control & Consent.

While Edwards, Friedman and Burawoy have pioneered most of the issues of discussion in the LPD, other contributions have been made if largely reactive and ad hoc, in specifying the problems and advances in the debate. As I pointed out in the introduction to this section, there have been two main dimensions to the LPD. On the one hand, the marxist or those who see their works as contributions to marxist scholarship and on the other hand those mainly concerned with the amelioration of the Weberian work/management studies. Littler & Salaman (1984:Ch.4), represent the latter. They derive the purpose of management from 'the need for co-ordination in modern industrial organization [which] is partly a consequence of the increasing division of labour' (p.49).

The 'capital/labour relations' is characterized as the sale of 'labour'. 'What is sold is... a preparedness to conform to the employer's demands within the bounds of capacity, skill, strength, knowledge, dexterity, etc (Littler & Salaman 1984:54). The implication of this is that the issue of relations in the production process is reduced to the problem of 'authority', even when terminologies like 'labour-power' or 'surplus-value' are employed. 'A crucial first step in the establishment of control over the workforce' is 'the establishment of management as a separate function, distinct from shopfloor workers, with unique expertise and responsibilities, and with major and critical claim to authority over the shopfloor' (Littler & Salaman 1982:259, 1984:67). This legitimation of the manage-



ment is seen as a fundamental aspect of work control; even when once in a while a group of workers question this competence (ibid), the limit is already set. Here Burawoy's understanding of consent is replicated. But this legitimation of managerial authority takes place not only in the formal structure of work, but via the informal structures as well. Here following Gouldner(1954), they point to the informal processes through which foremen mediate formal rules, and may even resent them(1982:260;1984:40&69). Like Burawoy and Edwards they see the foreman as oiling the wheel of production. At the societal level, they see the unquestioned acceptance of property rights as a principal process of the legitimation of the capitalist's control at work (Littler & Salaman 1982:259-60, 1984:67, Littler 1982:39). The exercise of managerial power is therefore always supplemented by consent or compliance.

An indication given of 'active compliance involving work group self-policing' (Littler & Salaman:1984:63) is the report by Kamata (1982:48), who describing the pace of the Toyota assembly line and the pressure on workers says 'we do our job in a hell of a hurry to keep our fellow workers from suffering'. All forms of cooperation in work are taken as necessarily legitimative of managerial power; 'that workers give way to the structure of power and control inherent in capitalist domination' (Thompson 1983:176). The specificity of capitalism loses its significance (Johnson 1980:337). It is reduced to the actualization of 'formal rationality' and the control of the workers as a class of bearers of labour-power, loses all its violent edge and essence (Aumeeruddy et al 1976). The very process of 'legitimizing' power relations is reduced to the triumph of 'rationality' (Johnson 1980). 'Control' loses its essence.

Other attempts at the analysis of control have tried to build on the analyses of Friedman, Edwards and Burawoy especially on the implications of the internal labour market. Winstanley (1986) has pointed to the varied dimension of recruitment strategies: to reduce post-entry uncertainties in workers' behaviour, and to enhance control over the workforce. Manwaring (1984:10) on the other hand has emphasized the significance of the 'extended internal labour market where recruitment is through the existing employees in a firm... [and] relies on social networks' of the workers themselves. 'Control' in this context 'is enhanced by greater knowledge of the candidate and the fact that existing em-

ployees have their reputation at stake in recommending friends or relatives' (c.f. Maguire 1984:18-21). Whipp (1982) and Hedges & Beynon (1982) also note the integration of whole generations of families into the firm. This however, is not uncontradictory in its outcome nor as Pfeffer (1979:91) notes, can its totality be grasped at the point of production alone (c.f. Aumeeruddy et al, 1976). Promotion, redundancy, intra-firm transfer and 'firing', have all been noted as specific dimensions enhancing management control within production process. (Pfeffer 1979, Littler & Salaman, 1982, 1984).

In contrast to the high-concentration on the issue of control, a number of contributors to the LPD have rejected either the centrality of control for capitalist Management and the uncritical presentation of management as a monolith. In the first case, Littler & Salaman (1982) have insisted that what production is about is accumulation and not control. On the other hand the internal 'hierarchical and functional differentiation' within management has been emphasized (Smith 1984; Armstrong 1983, 1985; Teulings 1985; Morgan & Hooper 1986). The 'vertical integration' of management, Rose & Jones (1985:90) argue, is problematic, and specific 'managerial strategy' may depend on which group within the management is dominant (Morgan & Hooper 1986:5-6). The conclusion drawn is that 'as management become differentiated so the connection of the strategies to the labour process itself becomes less direct' (Morgan & Hooper p.6). For Rose & Jones (1985:90), 'there is a variety of evidence to suggest that at least some corporate-level executives in Britain place a low salience on the policies for the regulation of their labour affairs'.

While the internal differentiation of management is important, for understanding of the dynamics of production relations and its 'porosity' (Palloix 1978, Elger 1979) which workers can exploit in confronting management, the conclusions drawn by Littler & Salaman, Rose & Jones and others are questionable. First, Rose & Jones for instance reduce the labour process to 'labour affairs', i.e. industrial relations or personnel matters. The low salience of labour process here actually means low salience of industrial relations as a corporate problem-issue and the relative importance attached to departments responsible for such issues. To conceptualize labour process in this way will be a gross mis-reading of Braverman and Marx. Second, and as Johnson (1980:359) points out the



centrality of valorization process and the realization of exchange-value to whatever shade of managerial/professional group: these criteria drop out of sight in most neo-Weberian analysis. Writers like Child (1984, 1985) -claiming to contribute to the LPD- have reduced valorization to the status of 'another "contingent" factor' in the managerial consideration. (Morgan & Hooper 1986:5; Smith 1984). Finally, those who insist that accumulation, not control is the principal issue of the capitalist production, replace the one-sided error of those who emphasize control to the neglect of valorization, with the reverse error. These issues are discussed further in section 5.

In any case those who reject the idea of Management control strategy often do so because they expect to find an explicitly verbalized 'management strategy' or one that takes the form of a written-and-bound book. The problem of empiricism or even phenomenology is the main draw back for this analytical position.

There have been further attempts also to theorize 'consent', or workers active participation in the production process. Cressey & MacInnes (1980) see the material basis of workers' consent in ways similar to that of Burawoy, although they use Marx's concept of 'the two-fold nature of the relationship of capital to labour'(p.14). The capitalist labour process is at once the terrain of concrete labour and of the production of value. Valorization itself is therefore encased in 'use-value' activities; the labour process as purposeful expenditure of effort. This is a process which can actively engage the interest of the worker to the extent that they are involved in creative activities: it is in subjecting 'the means of production to its own physical and mental operations, its own will, [that] the workforce actually expend any labour and create use-value' (p.13-14). However, because the production process is essentially a relation of exchange -the worker as a bearer of labour power and the fact that what is produced does not belong to him or her but the capitalist- creates a contrary effect: alienation. Nonetheless, they argue that while workers have to produce for the capitalist, the survival of the unit of capital which employs them is crucial for their own economic survival. The twinned nature of the contradictory nature of the capital-labour relations, means workers' interests and the capitalist's are both common and contradictory.

Manwaring & Wood (1985) have expanded on the issue of the active engagement of the workers in the production process by developing the notion of 'tacit skill' as 'the ghost in the labour process'. Tacit skill involves three dimension: first, every work involves the process of learning even the most routine task. Second, every work involves the process of learning the 'trick of the trade' (1985:172) and the third dimension 'relates to the collective dimension of the labour process and the necessity for workers to develop co-operative skill' (ibid). This analysis of tacit skill draws attention to the 'importance of the fundamental psychological process by which workers identify in relation to the labour process' (p.174). What it does not however do, is undermine Braverman's argument of the degradation of work under monopoly capitalism. Tacit skill does not mean that the 'circuit' of the labour process is not being systematically fractured, from the perspective of the worker.

In conclusion, it is important to return to the conceptualization of 'control'. Edwards (1983:22-25) has emphasized the problems of empiricism in reducing 'control' to the category of 'power'. For Littler & Salaman (1982:265) the result of asserting that 'the first priority of capitalism is accumulation, not control', is that 'control only becomes a concern when profitability is threatened.' Control is therefore intermittent and not immanent in accumulation itself. Friedman's (1979:82-4) and Edwards' (1979:17-8) conceptions of control do not seriously transcend the 'power' category either, and veers on the side of empiricism. In typifying capitalism on the basis of an imaginary 'feudalism' on the other hand, Burawoy does not even start to comprehend Braverman's position. 'Control', Edwards (1983:22) points out, 'refer to the structure of the situation in which power is not in evidence because it is grounded in a view of the employment relationship'. Given Burawoy's account of feudalism, the same could be said of control within the feudal labour process. In any case, we are still left with the rejection of a possible theory of 'the capitalist labour process' (see Littler & Salaman 1982, Storey 1983), a sentiment Burawoy (1981:97) shares. Overcoming these requires a return to the distinction Marx draws between 'formal' and 'real subsumption of labour under capital' and the essential link between different dimensions of production process under capitalism, which I will return to in section 5.



### 2.3. Resistance & Struggles: a survey.

One of the most sustained criticisms of Braverman is his alleged neglect of workers' resistance. This, with the 'deskilling' thesis, has been the impetus for most writings on the labour process which stress worker resistance as the alter-ego to capitalist control. As I noted earlier, all the three principal contributors to the LPD have taken the issue of workers' struggle in hand with their discussions of control or consent.

#### 2.3.1 Friedman & Edwards: the resistance of control.

Friedman's analysis of 'worker resistance' is developed in opposition to what he sees as Marx's conception of class struggle only in terms of the destruction of capitalism (1979:48-50), and the development of capitalism as 'chiefly a technical matter' (p.43). He concentrates on the mode of capitalist accommodation to worker resistance (p.48) and seeks to move beyond the Leninist 'trade union/socialist consciousness' dichotomy (c.f Hyman 1971). Resistance is rooted in labour-power as 'variable capital', defined as the intelligence, subjective state of workers, and their alienation from the labour process (pp.81-2).<sup>9</sup> He goes on to define resistance as 'individual' or 'collective' and the latter further 'into highly organized or institutionalized resistance compared with "spontaneous" collective resistance' (p.51). 'Individualistic resistance' is concerned 'with loss of control over the workers' labour power' (p.51), expressed in deception of the foreman, absenteeism and voluntary quits, refusing to carry out instructions, sabotage, etc(p.51). Although collective resistance does take the forms of individual resistance, there is however an undertone of qualitative difference between the two, and a recognition of unevenness in the capacity to resist. The greater the homogeneity and size of the workforce, the greater the strength to resist (pp.52-54). However, the organization built for collective action could also be used against the workers (pp.54-55). Friedman's model is basically one of control, resistance and counter measure from the management to regain control.

<sup>9</sup> The use of 'variable capital' here mis-reads Marx. For Marx 'variable capital' refers to that segment of capital advanced as the exchange-value of labour-power: 'required for the reproduction of the working class' (Marx 1969a:416, c.f. 1976:317/417/713 & Bekerman 1986:20-1).

Edwards(1979) shares Friedman's broad position and more explicitly sees conflict as arising from divergence in the interests of workers and employers; 'what is good for one is frequently costly for the other' (p.12). The workplace within the context of conflict is typified as 'a battle ground', a 'contested terrain' over 'how work shall be organized, what work pace shall be established, what conditions producers must labor under, what rights workers shall enjoy, and how the various employees of the enterprise shall relate to each other' (p.13). These conflicts are however conducted 'under definite historical circumstances, or... within a specific economic and social context... a product of both the strategies or wills of the combatants and definite conditions not wholly within the grasp of either workers or capitalist.' (p.15)

Resistance as the actualization of conflict, under the three control types, seems to follow the lines of individual resistance under simple/hierarchical control, to acquiescence (p.26) under direct entrepreneurial control, and 'sabotage, physical threat to exceptionally tyrannical foremen, appeals to higher bosses, and collective (if informal) understandings about work paces' (p.53) under hierarchical control. These supplement strike actions, although less as institutional types. The age of technical control apparently moves the focus towards union-based collective resistance, a shift he categories as being 'from shopfloor resistance to collective struggle' (p.57). The rise of bureaucratic control produces working class segmentation and largely acquiescent workers in the primary labour markets; the important thing is the withering away of resistance in those areas (Ch.9). It becomes difficult to tally Edwards' categories of conflict with acquiescence under entrepreneurial control or under bureaucratic control, which assumes the non-existence of resistance.

While Edwards' political conclusions need not concern us at this time it is nonetheless important to note Diamond's (1979:49-50) critique of his insistence on 'a direct causal relation between worker militancy and capitalist decision-making' at the point of production. That technical control is responsible for the spate of unionism in the 1930s 'cannot explain the growth of unions in the trucking industry' for instance (Diamond,1979:49). What is neglected in deriving every direction of workers' militancy is the dimensions of the class struggle in the social formation as a whole, the conjuncture of



which is not reducible to issues of specific units of capital. Diamond points to 'the years of patient work of militant socialists and trade unionists on the shopfloor' (p.50), as a point of departure. Neither is it possible to explain the 'lack of political consciousness' outside the history and persistence of 'a fierce red-baiting withchunt' (Geller 1979:44). Edwards' analysis fails to deal with specific historical premises of worker resistance or acquiescence, to locate struggles and the role of political activists and activism.

### 2.3.2. Burawoy: From Internal State to Politics of Production.

As in the discussion of control, Burawoy's procedure for analyzing worker resistance or struggle differ significantly from Edwards' or Friedman's and the analysis developed on two distinct levels. Up till 1981 Burawoy's discussion of resistance or conflict was woven around the operations of the 'game'. The 'political' moment of work, as the terrain of the reproduction of the 'economic' moment was discussed mainly in terms of the 'Internal Labour Market' (ILM) and the 'Internal State' (IS). Both 'co-ordinate the interest of capitalist and the laborer in the generation of surplus value' (1979:107, 114-120). The ILM has the additional consequence of 'dissolving some of the tensions between workers and management and generates new tensions among workers' (1979:107). The IS - alternatively referred to as the 'factory regime'- was defined largely in terms of the 'Industrial Relations system' within the context of the workplace. The IS, through the mechanism of collective bargaining 'displaces conflict' between different agents of production from the shopfloor, where it can lead to work disruption, and on the other hand reconstitutes conflict in a framework of negotiation' (1979:114-5). The IS involves at best negotiations around marginal issues, which do not threaten the capitalist ownership, as a result 'capitalist relations of ownership and control become the object of consent' (p.115). Collective bargaining becomes just 'another game -this time a game about rules and outcomes of other games, such as making out' (p.115).

The category of 'factory regimes' was defined as corresponding to different stages of capitalism: 'competitive' or 'monopoly' capitalism, in terms of the balance of coercion and consent. (1979:193-203). Where consent predominates over coercion he called a 'hegemonic' factory regime; the reverse case was referred to as a 'despotic' regime. The very

existence of the internal state is 'characterized by the subordination of both workers and management to the impersonal rule of law'(1979:116), which assumes that the 'relative autonomy' of the IS is necessary for its role in generating 'consent' (pp.116-120).

While this position may be valid in many instances, it is only as an extension of Burawoy's pessimistic view of workers' capacity to wage any meaningful struggle. Burawoy neglected any form of workers oppositional activities or the possibility of any meaningful struggles even within the industrial relations context. Having define all aspects of workers' activities on the shopfloor as a game, these activities could only be seen as 'reinforcing the system' (Clawson & Fantasia 1983:676). The problem with this is that this conclusion flies in the face of Burawoy's narrative of the situation in 'Allied'. An example of this is the extent to which rate-busters are restrained by the work-group. As he himself acknowledged (1979:165);

anyone turning in more than his or her quota was subject to considerable social pressure and harassment. Operators, time clerks, foremen, and others were always on the lookout for operators who might be turning in more than the quota either accidentally or intentionally. (emphasis mine)

At the level of organized union action, officials have issues instructions restricting output in order to save jobs at a time management was contemplating retrenchment of workers. These are two of the issues to which Burawoy turned a blind eye. As Clawson & Fantasia (1983:680) point out, Burawoy's position is 'perilously close to the "end of ideology" [thesis] of an earlier era'. 'Class struggle', as Gartman (1983:661) notes, does not 'enter as an important determinant. If struggle is taken into account, it is only as a factor facilitating rather than contradicting the immanent development of the structure'. It is a pessimism which I think derives from his intellectual location in Marcuse and Althusser, and one often gets the feeling that Burawoy went into 'Allied' expecting the workers to be chorusing the Internationale and tearing down capitalism. Since this did not happen, they could well be thrown to the refuse heap of history. While recognizing the failure to distinguish between work and 'working on work' (see my Ch.1) in Harastzi (1977) work, Burawoy himself failed to demonstrate his own awareness of it (c.f Burawoy 1985:Ch.4).

However by 1981, there were clear signs of an attempt to rectify this earlier (pessimistic) tendency: he attempts to examine workers 'in periods of turbulence as well



as passivity' (1985:8). He however retains the distinction between 'adaptation' to work and 'resistance' (1978:273-4fn, 1985:76fn). The former, denotes 'worker responses... [which] are ideological mechanisms through which workers are sucked into accepting what is as natural' (ibid). By contrast, resistance involves an explicit articulation of workers' grievances; in form of strike action or revolutionary upsurge. The line is therefore drawn over the extent of perceptible collective expression. The premise of this shift in position is defined as an attempt to bring the working class back into the historical focus (1985:5-20). Workers are seen as representing 'the most fundamental point of critique' of capitalism (1985:9). The development of the concept of the 'politics of production' became central to this task (1984, 1985).

In contrast to his earlier position (1979), he drops the idea of IS. First, because the notion of IS as the political moment of work blurs 'the essential association of the state with the monopoly of the means of organized coercion. The state remains the decisive nucleus of power in capitalist societies'(1985:11). Second, because 'there was no obvious warrant for referring to factory apparatuses as an "internal state" while denying such a designation for family apparatuses' (1985:11). Politics is everywhere. The idea of a 'factory regime' therefore assumes a new meaning, 'encompassing [the political] apparatuses [of production] and the political effects of the labour process' (1985:11). The "'politics of production" provides the critical conceptual link between the labor process itself and global politics, whose object is the state' (1981:84).<sup>10</sup> 'Politics of production' becomes activities or dynamics within the factory regime or as organized by it. In contrast with the IS, unionism or collective bargaining is not a necessary component. Central to the politics of production is the relation between the State and the factory apparatuses. In an Althusserian fashion, the State not only shapes the production -family or community- apparatuses, but also guarantees the reproduction of the relations encrusted within them (1985:254). It is on the basis of this that the typology of factory regimes (see Annex 2.1).

The four types of regimes that emerge correspond to different social conjunctures. 'Market despotism' corresponds to early capitalism, 'hegemonic system', to monopoly

<sup>10</sup> The categories of 'factory regime' and the 'political apparatuses of production' are used inter-changingly.

capitalism and the rise of welfare state. On the other hand, 'bureaucratic despotism' corresponds to the situation in the Hungarian Red Star factory studied by Harastzi (1977) and Burawoy (1985:Ch.4). This is because 'coercion prevailed over consent' (1985:12). The 'collective self-management' production politics is however reserved for some later-day (non existent) socialist society. A major premise of the taxonomy not made explicit in it is whether or not the workers depend solely on their wages for subsistence (1984:127). If they do, then the factory regime is likely to be despotic, if they do not, then it is likely to be hegemonic. This typology, as could be imagined, is of circumscribed heuristic value.<sup>11</sup>

In dealing with types of production politics under advanced capitalism (1985:Ch.3) for instance, he had to shift to a taxonomy based on the conjuncture of state provision for the reproduction of the workers and the extent of the state regulation of factory regimes (See Annex 2.2). If one superimpose the previous typology on this would obviously leave Japan in the 'market despotism' box, which given the monopoly capital nature of the Japanese firms -that are the focus of 'theorizing'- would have been contradictory as a schema for periodizing capitalism. Burawoy himself recognized two instances where the schemata do not fit the reality. Factory regimes in the period of the rise of monetarism, attacks on trade union rights, international or regional plant relocations, was designated 'hegemonic despotism'.(1985:150). Hegemonic because 'the interests of capital and labour continue to be concretely coordinated' except that the workers are the ones making the concessions now. The second instance concerns the political apparatus of production in the Zambian coppermines under colonial capitalism, he coined the term 'colonial despotism', because coercion predominates consent, and it is of course colonial. The problem, I believe, is that Burawoy is working backwards from the post-1945 -or New Deal- era of keynesian consensus; with the emergence of the welfare state and greater tolerance to unions. Having defined this situation as consensual and hegemonic, he approaches other

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<sup>11</sup> While Burawoy recognized this problem he assumes it is a matter of whether or not it explains transition from one regime to another (1985:13) or 'deals with the relations among enterprises'. He thinks it does that 'insofar as these affect the politics of production' (1981:121).



socio-historical contexts from that view point. A specific historical experience is therefore being set up as an ideal-type, in spite of Burawoy's socialist commitment.

Furthermore, although of heuristic value, the conjuncture of production and global politics remains mechanistic. For instance, while he has become more attentive to extra-workplace basis of social consciousness (1985:99-102), it is still framed around the primacy of the political apparatuses of production, rather than dialectically connected. Second, his conception of struggles at the point of production is still largely devoid of its location within the currents of wider social struggle. Where he attempts it, as in the case of the Russian situation, it is in exclusive reference to production politics. Global politics flow directly from production politics. Like Edwards, he neglects the (purposeful) radical activities which undermine the hegemony of the dominant classes or the ruling bloc. In the case of pre-1917 Russia, the revolutionary activities outside the factory, the activities of organizations like the Narodniks, the Bolsheviks, etc., become peripheral. In trying to establish -creditably- the linkage between production politics and global politics, he neglects other arenas of social struggles; the same he replicates for Zambia. The dialectics trapped within a structuralist paradigm remains one sided, even if an advance on his earlier position. Finally, from an understanding of the three moments of work, as purely analytical device, we are led towards a gradual disengagement of the 'economic' from the 'political' and 'ideological', the production process itself becomes less and less problematic. When Burawoy gets away from the tyranny of taxonomy, his explanatory power becomes more respectable, as it is to some extent in the discussion of the Zambian coppermines (1985:Ch.5).

While it is important to stress the advance over his earlier workers one should remember the extent to which the broad outline remains the same. His retention (1985:76n) of the distinction 'adaptation' to work and 'resistance' (1978:273-4n), the broad structuralist outline are two examples. The obvious flaws in the distinction between adaptation and resistance are (i) the zero-sum view of consciousness, (ii) struggles are taken as the 'determined' objects of the 'factory regimes', and (iii) the factory regime is itself determined objects of state politics. Nonetheless the significance of his advance should not be under-estimated. The category of production politics and their conjuncture with global

politics has great potentials. His distinction between 'adaptation' and resistance/struggle is also potentially useful in analyzing the complex dialectics of work relations that a proper understanding of struggles at the point of production must take on board. In spite of any critique of his work it remains a most incisive attempt at a comprehensive understanding of production politics and global politics.

### 2.3.3. Worker Resistance at Large.

In this sub-section I am concerned with the wider discussion of worker resistance. In terms of the dispositions that underscore resistance, Hyman & Brough (1975) note the notions of 'fairness', 'social justice', etc. These may derive from what is seen as the permissible boundary of obligation. 'Skilled toolmakers are normally conservative.... unlikely to contest in general terms the right of management to manage; but a supervisor who instructed a toolmaker to sweep the floor would likely be told to fuck off' (Hyman 1980a:314). Sabel (1982) links the 'world views' of some workers to their roots in their peasant origin. Gallie's (1978) study of the refineries in France and Britain, reveals the connection between conduct of industrial conflict and the political culture of the environment, which does not derive from the technology of the work nor the labour process per se. Lubeck's (1978, 1986) study of workers in Kano, Nigeria, reveals how their consciousness is underscored not by 'perceived' working class, as a distinct class, but by that 'of the urban talakawa (the commoners)... In this context the urban working class identifies itself as the labouring class and, at the same time, as a member of a vaguely defined urban popular stratum' (p.45).

The connection between work and non-work contexts in the articulation of worker resistance is however of wider effects than just underscoring resistance. The significant feature of the Senegalese, North African and Portuguese immigrants' strike in the Renault plant in Flins, France in 1973, for instance is the extent to which non-workplace factors like 'anger over devaluation of the franc and complaints about unlivable, expensive housing' formed the background of the strike. (Sabel.1982:133) The Turkish immigrants' strike in the Ford plant in Cologne in 1973 follow similar line. A situation which Sabel (1982:133) notes is grounded in E.P Thompson's 'moral economy of the poor' and



outside the conventional understanding of industrial conflict/action. The Ford strike also involved the use of the immigrants' extra-workplace community -wives, etc- in organizing pickets and keeping strikebreakers out, as well as 'dancing and fetes in an occupied factory' (1982:134)

Lubeck's (1978, 1986) study of a textile factory in Kano, Northern Nigeria, reveals how, against the background of a religiously homogeneous workforce, grievances and strike actions were organized first around religious demands but soon snowballed into demands on 'control over the labour process and the... issue of job security' (1978:44). The very act of organizing collective actions 'improved the workers' confidence' (p.45). Against the background of previous collective actions, the workers learnt not only about tactics of dealing with their managements like 'cutting the telephone lines from the manager's office to force a payment or an agreement to pay before the police could be called' (p.41). But also in terms of consciousness, 'the expression that they used to describe this change was, "our eyes have been opened"' (p.43). Jackson's (1978) study of the women's strike action of 1977 on the vegetable plantation of BUD the Brussels company (p.22) in the same town, reveals the use of traditional forms of village and women's organization as the motor of the action. This in a society where women are supposed to be subordinate (pp.24-32).

There is on the other hand the issue of the forms that worker resistance can take. Traditionally, industrial relations and most perspectives in advance capitalism have examined resistance largely in terms of strike action and other union-based collective action. If these reveal that there is a strong relation between the cultural environment - loosely defined- and workers' struggle and resistance, it still does not tell us about type and mode of its articulation. Even within this context, strike actions as Gouldner (1955) points out are not usually what they appear to be, both in terms of the motive and the basis of organization. Within unions, Hyman (1972:Ch.1; 1975; 1979; 1980a) points to the complex role of union leadership, and even here, strike actions do not necessarily get organized through unions or fall into conventional process. (c.f Sabel 1982 above)

Cohen (1980) has however queried the usefulness of strike action as a useful indicator of collective activism, especially under peripheral capitalism. His survey of 'hidden

forms of worker consciousness', shows sabotage, desertion, 'target working', the creation of 'work-culture' (c.f van Onselen 1976), theft, etc., as varied forms of collective action. Theft for instance 'can be usefully considered as a wage supplement' (p.20). Sabotage on the other hand varies from the case of the Mauritian sugar-cane cutters who set the sugar-cane plantation on fire (1980:8) 'not as in normal case to delay production and evade work, but precisely to ensure that they would be permitted to work' (p.12); to the case of the Lagos plastic factory workers. 'After a wage demand had been refused... [they] systematically jinxed the machinery, the vats, the molds and the firm's transport'(p.17). The work-culture as a 'counter-culture' takes many forms, involving 'in-jokes, private linguistic codes, wall slogans', etc (p.17), targeted against the 'white management'. If these show the multiple dimension of collective action, it also shows that they do not necessarily coincide with unions as conventionally defined in industrial relations.

How do we understand, on the other hand 'individual' acts of resistance? To what extent are they 'individual'? To what extent does the case of the two Mauritian cane cutters setting the plantation ablaze represent individual resistance? To what extent does absenteeism or labour turnover represent individual forms of resistance or even resistance at all?. As Edwards (1986a) notes 'to the extent that evidence on such things as labour turnover is available, the implications of the evidence are far from obvious. A high rate of turnover can point to several influences in addition to "protest"' (Ch.3 p.28). When Ford Motor Co.'s turnover rate was some 380% in 1913, there was no doubt what it indicated: dissatisfaction. But as Braverman (1974:149) notes, this was because there were other jobs to run to, 'workers were forced to submit to it by the disappearance of other forms of work in that industry.' In any case the idea of absenteeism for instance lacked precision in a period or a work situation where 'employers did not try to enforce attendance at specific times' (Edwards 1986a:28). Nonetheless, the concept of 'individual' forms of resistance is assumed valid, not the least because 'individual forms of action... have had a more consistent effect on workplace relations than the relatively rare outbursts of collective protest' (Edwards 1986a:Ch.3, p.27). This presumes that we know what collective as distinct from individual protest is. But what is clear from most attempts to discuss 'individual' forms of resistance is that they peter out even before they



get off the ground. Much remains in the area both for specifying and theorizing. How individual does a protest or resistance have to get?. What makes the threat of/or physical attack on a boss, individual?. In any case why is absenteeism or turnover or desertion individual?. What in a given environment gives a particular form of resistance its colouration?.

Another distinction often made is between 'organized' and 'unorganized' forms of resistance. The terms which often flow from industrial relations academia largely coincide with not just unionism but official union hierarchy', official as against unofficial actions. Nichols & Beynon (1977:136) also made a similar distinction between covert action which 'take place outside of established union-management relationships' and the overt more visible ones. But what is the link between 'collective', 'organized' and 'overt' forms of resistance on the one hand, and 'individual', 'unorganized', 'covert' actions on the other?. There are few, if any attempts to deal with this issue beyond a peripheral interaction with and near eclectic use of terminologies. Some of these issues will be addressed in the main body of this thesis.

#### 2.4. Labour Process Under Peripheral Capitalism.

The essence of this sub-section is to link the labour process discussion with the peripheral capitalist context through the review of the contributors who have attempted to make this link.

Burawoy's analysis of the labour process in the Zambian coppermines in Manufacturing Consent (1979) is couched in the dominant thesis he was advancing at the time: the 'relative autonomy' of the labour process. Here, among other things, he argues against the 'myth of the traditional worker' (pp.211-15), asserts the irrelevance of the idea of the cultural lag and rejects any congruity between the 'values and norms of the village' and activities on the shopfloor (p.213). However, the implications of the colonial state and the post-colonial state for relations in the production process are distinct. From the racial character of the organization of the labour process and the hierarchy under colonialism, to zambianization process -the indigenization of supervisory and personnel posts- under the post-colonial state. Also highlighted are the extent to which functionaries of

the post-colonial state manipulate nationalist symbols and patriotism for the intensification of labour.

In Politics of Production, he labels the type of factory regime under colonialism, colonial despotism, as I pointed out earlier. 'Colonial, because one racial group dominates through political, legal and economic rights denied to the other' (1985:226); 'despotic, because force prevails over consent' (226). His stipulation of the 'rise of the company state' reiterates the basis of colonial capitalism in which for a significant period the companies exercised the power of the state over the indigenous population (p.228). Even in the period following the formal establishment of the colonial state, this continued. In spite of the pervasive surveillance and domination of the workers, workers' struggles were organized around media as diverse as cultural associations and religious bodies (pp.229-30). Also significant is the way in which 'the very form of the compound and the "corporate" labour strategies of the companies consolidated the unitary structure of the mining community and encouraged the development of class consciousness'(1985:229).

The post-colonial situation, on the other hand, is viewed in terms of a disjunction between the labour process and the production apparatuses. (p.235) The fact of some Zambians undertaking managerial functions did not alter the nature of the labour process nor relations of domination. Shopfloor resistance took forms as diverse as 'tracklayers... taking it easy during the day in order to conserve energy for overtime' (p.237), which in the context of Allied would have been categorized as 'voluntary servitude', to threatening indigenous foremen with occult power and strikes and 'walk outs'. Despite the post-colonial state's ban on strikes and the co-optation of Union leadership by the ruling party and the state, it did not stop workers' strike actions. The incorporation into the analysis of the intervening media between the production politics and global politics is here better presented, it could be because the connection in Zambia, as in perhaps many peripheral capitalist situations, is more immediate. But the linkages between the specifically capitalist mode of production and other modes were articulated only in terms of 'primitive accumulation', not for instance, in how they point in the direction of the crisis of capitalist control of the emergent working class or the capitalist mode itself.



Munck's (1986:ch.4)<sup>12</sup> survey of writings on the labour process in the 'third world' reveals great diversity in modes of organizing production, from the Malay rubber tappers who 'frequently work in the forest by themselves or in small groups and... [are] paid on a piece rate basis' (Paige 1975:356) to the Sri Lankan female tea-pluckers under the direct supervision of the field officer (Kurran 1982, Munck 1986). But here 'the capitalist production relation is overlaid by the patriarchal organization of the tea estates' (Munck 1986:129). The hand-made cigarette industry in India reveals the overlap between home and factory, where the female workers spend six hours in the 'factory' - 'an ill-ventilated room into which the women are crammed' - but 'after that... bring home the leaf for the next day's [cigarettes].. spend the rest of the day wetting the leaf and laying it out to dry' (Munck 1986:131). Even in full blown factory situation, recruitment from the rural areas has been cited as a means of ensuring 'a malleable, obedient, healthy and stable work force at least for the first two to three years' (Yun 1984:216 in Munck 1986). This points to the implication of the non-capitalist formation -and relations- in the capitalist production process.

Humphrey's (1980/81) study of the auto assembly industry in Brazil, highlights the organization of the internal labour market and control of the work force on the basis of the external labour market and the absence of job security (p.50). The relatively high wage offered by the auto industry ensures not just a readily available pool of workers but also the imposition of an intense rhythm of work within the production process (p.50). Although his discussion of resistance is largely in terms of union-based collective action, this was often confronted with 'the use of the police and the army and workers in the auto industry were subjected to arrest, imprisonment and torture' (p.51). The 'limited liberalization' of political activities in Brazil however, had direct implications for the labour movement especially in the auto industry. The intensification of workers' activities and the decline in the repressive character of the state on which the employers in the auto industry, for instance, could rely, 'has started to produce a shift in management strategy... In its most limited form, this means being more attentive to workers' com-

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<sup>12</sup> All quotes from manuscript.

plaints and attempting to resolve small problems before the union can take them up' (p.52). This differs from the simple control-resistance scenario.

Munck has tried to outline the framework for the analysis of 'the politics of production' and labour process in the 'third world' (1986:Ch.4 p.147) He identifies four main forms of labour process; (i) petty commodity production, (ii) manufacture, (iii) machinofacture, and (iv) automated production (p.148). It is however difficult to see how one can handle his notion of 'the Third World labour process' (p.149), part of which the above four are supposed to be. His notion of politics of production, on the other hand, does not capture the dynamics or the breadth of Burawoy's with reference to the Zambian copper-mines, since politics of production is defined largely in terms of the way the production process is organized. Yet beside Burawoy, Munck is, perhaps, the only person to try theorizing the politics of production under peripheral capitalism.

What is clear so far is that one cannot reduce the labour process or the politics of production in peripheral capitalism to an approximation of the same under advanced capitalism. Not least because of the proximity of varied non-capitalist modes of production. The specific interaction of the capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production and reproduction of social life, and their connection with international capitalism have distinct implications for the modes that production relations at the point of production and the politics of production take in the peripheral context. But so are the distinctive non-capitalist socio-cultural and ideological terrains which give each conjuncture, each class -interfaced in national racial or regional context- its definitive colouration. These are areas which still demand investigation and theorizing.

## 2.5. The Labour Process Debate: a general critique.

The main development of the LPD which I have surveyed so far needs to be put into perspective. In the explosion of the LPD intellectual industry, it would have become clear by now that not only has Braverman's initial agenda and specific marxist 'problematic' been buried under scores of academic revisions and refutations but it is also being incorporated into an essentially bourgeois work sociology/management studies schema. While many contributions have been veritably disingenuous, most have resulted



from a mis-reading of LMC and Marx. I will discuss this problem under three headings, viz.; the conception of production which is part of a crisis of eclecticism, the mis-understanding of the method and categories of abstraction, and the fragmentation of the circuit of capital into a preoccupation with 'Control', 'Consent' and 'Resistance'. The root of this goes beyond the LPD, and it is important to trace this.

The collapse of Parsonian sociology, orthodox economics and the end-of-ideology thesis in the 1960s, (Clarke 1977, 1982; Shaikh 1981) created a renewed interest in Marx. 'Marxism' suddenly became intellectually respectable -given the cold-war hostility of the 1950s- within bourgeois academic institutions. Within Sociology for instance Marx became one of the 'fathers of sociology' alongside Weber, Durkheim, etc (Giddens 1971). In contrast to the parsonian problematic, Marx became a 'conflict' theorist (Rex 1961, Burrell & Morgan 1979). But there were a number of other dimensions to this process; first, Marx was seen as complementing bourgeois social science, and sometimes an archaic 19th century voice which Weber had modernized. The result of this was that eclecticism became institutionalized. Second, most attempts -mainly on the 'Left'- to 'modernize' Marx, commence from an essentially bourgeois problematic (Clarke 1977, 1980, 1982, Shaikh 1980, 1981). In sociological studies, a new structuralism emerged and in economics, Marx became a theorist of price determination. As Colletti's (1972) essay on Bernstein and the Second International shows, this is by no means a new problem.<sup>13</sup>

Almost to the last detail, the LPD is a re-run of history. By the late '70s industrial sociology, industrial relations, management studies, etc. were in a state of stagnation.<sup>14</sup> The Keynesian consensus was at an end, the 'New Right' was in ascendance, and an international capitalist crisis of realization was having severe effects on the 'old-industrial' capitalist societies. In the same way that Marx -or rather the scavenging of Marx- was to revitalize bourgeois social science in the '60s, Braverman's LMC, was in the 1980s supposed to resuscitate bourgeois work relations studies (Knight & Willmot 1986:1). As a

<sup>13</sup> My comments are not meant to question the 'marxist credentials' of LPD contributors who see themselves as marxists -no critic of Althusser or Poulantzas can doubt their genuineness as marxists. Moreover the developments in the '60s enabled people like me to engage with Marx in the comfort of bourgeois academe. The 'anti-Marx' position of some LPD writers is, however, explicit.

<sup>14</sup> My gratitude to Peter Armstrong (IRRU-Warwick) who first drew my attention to this aspects of the LPD.

continuation of the post-1960s eclectic tradition, the fundamental conceptual and methodological distinctions between Marx's Capital -and works based on it- and bourgeois academia was lost on most contributors to the LPD.

Most obvious of this is the conception of production. As I noted earlier, Braverman -following Marx- specifies the capitalist production as commodity form and he situates the labour process within these social relations of production. This is in sharp contrast to the technicist conception which runs through bourgeois sociology and economics, which Braverman explicitly challenged. By contrast, most of the LPD contributors actually operate from a technical conception of production. Their use of the category of 'social relations of production' being mostly gestural or rooted in Weberian mapping of market relations on production (Hill 1981, Salaman 1982, 1982a, Littler & Salaman 1982, 1984; Storey 1983, 1985, 1985a; Child 1985, Rose & Jones 1985, Edwards 1983, 1986). As with the Sraffian economists, the idea of exploitation in many of these works is essentially sociological (c.f. Shaikh 1981), sometimes phenomenologically derived (Hill 1981, Edwards 1986: Chs .1 & 2). Against this background one can understand the ambiguous use of the very concept of 'labour process'. Often it is a synonym for 'workplace' and sometimes it means 'industrial relations' or personnel matters (Rose & Jones 1985). The argument here is not that bourgeois sociology does not study social relations in the workplace; that would be absurd. It is that the conception of such relations in a Weberian sociology involves grafting market relations onto the workplace. Production, especially under capitalism, is conceived as a rational expression of 'society'. The technical condition of production creates the relations not the reverse. The confusion of a Weberian problematic with Marx's is vividly portrayed in Salaman's (1982a:52-3) discussion of Braverman's idea of class relations. There was hardly any awareness of the fundamental difference in Weberian and Marx's conception of class (c.f. Clarke 1977,1982, Hyman 1980b:31,43fn). When Littler & Salaman (1982) therefore proclaim the futility of a theory of the labour process, one must understand their location in a Weberian tradition not a Marxist one, -at least not Braverman's or Marx's. For the moment it is therefore crucial to understand that simply talking of 'production' -see Ch.1- is not enough, since bourgeois social science also has its conception of 'production relations'.



A self-consciously marxist analysis like Burawoy's is not immune from this problem. The distinction that Burawoy (1984:12) draws between 'relations in production' and 'relations of production' ends up in a situation where the latter, not the former, is the relation of exploitation. The distinction which derives from Weberian Sociology of Work is always in danger of the Weberian reduction of production to technical matters. The relations of production, in Burawoy's analyses, become the abode of production politics. In spite of his best intentions, he de-problematized the terrain of the expenditure of labour-power and handed it over to the manufacture of consent.

The way in which the categories of 'control', 'consent' and 'resistance' became the defining items of the LPD is perhaps another indication of how Braverman's -and often by extension, Marx's- 'agenda' became subsumed under a managerialist one. 'Control' had always been a buzz word since the 1960s, Flanders, for instance, advised the functionaries of capital of the prudence of sharing control in order to regain it. That it should feature so prominently within a neo-Weberian (often managerialist) LPD is therefore not a big surprise. The argument here suggesting that 'control' or 'consent' should not be studied; the problem is that most of the discussions, which were meant to correct Braverman's 'errors' ended up with a discussion of control without any perception of the essence of the capitalist labour process as a unity of concrete labour and exchange-value production, or the moment of production as only one (albeit the most crucial) in the circuit of capital. The circuit as a unity of the spheres of production and exchange became lost under the rubric of control/resistance/consent discussion. Understandably the bourgeois Sociology of Work sees work only in concrete labour terms; never fully comprehending the duality of the capitalist labour process. Even among marxist contributors like Friedman (1977, 1979), Edwards (1979), and Gordon et al (1982) 'control and resistance' develop minds of their own, with a truncated view of the sphere of production or the unity of the circuit of capital, even when crucial for their analyses (Nolan & Edwards 1984:198). By contrast Braverman retains a vision of the linkage in the moments of the circuit (see Parts I, II and III in LMC).

Reaction to the ubiquitous 'Control' literature has been in two forms. The first derives from the Management Studies. The subscribers to this view reject any idea of

'management strategy', more so over 'labour'; Rose & Jones (1985) exemplify this response. A variant of this position stresses the intra-Management squabbles often along professional lines (Armstrong 1983, Daniel & Millward 1983, Storey 1983, Teulings 1984, c.f Hyman 1987b & Ch.2). The other response, represented by Littler & Salaman (1982), starts from the position that the purpose of production is 'accumulation' not control. As I note above Rose & Jones's (1985) conceived of 'the labour process' as a synonym for industrial relations. As I pointed out in the review, they fail to deal with the purpose of production and their method is suspect -I mean, it is a trifle absurd to argue that the process of commodity production (the labour process) is unimportant in IBM because it is not unionized!. However, in the light of the way the Control-school conducted the discussion of the labour process, the cautionary note on the internal segmentation of Management is an important one to make. Intra-Management division may enhance or hinder the valorization criteria but it is at a lower level of abstraction to the essence of production. If there is one strategic issue in capitalist production it is the promotion and maintenance of the self-expansion of capital (de Vroey 1980, Johnson 1980, Braverman 1974: Ch.12).

The Littler & Salaman-type response on the other hand replaces the error of the 'Control' writers with an opposite one. First, it implies that valorization can happen without the capitalist control and direction of the labour process; and second it leads to the fragmentation of the circuit of capital. The latter takes two related forms. First, it leads to what Sheila Cohen (1987) calls the 'de-centring of the labour process', because as in the case of Kelly (1985) once it is suggested that capitalism can be understood without prioritizing the sphere of production, the analysis will end up 'displacing contradiction to the level of the market' (Cohen 1987:38), an essentially Weberian position.<sup>15</sup> Second, it promotes the idea that New Value is created on the floor of the stock-exchange or the money-'market'. A company may raise millions of pound in the 'stock-market', that does

<sup>15</sup> An equally serious problem in Kelly(1985) is the reduction of Marx's circuit of capital to 'purchase of labour power; extraction of surplus value in the labour process; realisation of surplus value within the product market' (p.32). This is at best a glossy presentation of neo-Ricardian economics with a veneer of Marx's category. (see Capital Vol II, Part One). Marx, to the best of my knowledge, is the only one to talk of 'circuit of capital'. It is within this context that one understands the de-problematization of the sphere of production.



not mean new value is being created; only a re-distribution of part of the social money-capital/revenue in the firm's direction. To presume that new value is being created is to fall for the illusion of the market-place, which is in fact the mark of bourgeois economics. An excellent attempt by Morgan & Hooper (1987) to theorize intra-Management factions on the basis of the different moments of the circuit of capital (the circuits of money, productive and commodity capitals) also fell foul of the market illusion. The schema derives from Elson (1986:52-3) who suggests that the circuits of money, productive and commodity capital correspond to the view-points of the accountant, the production and the marketing managers, respectively. In a less explicit way Braverman (1974:Ch.12) made a similar argument in explaining the expansion in management specialization.

The advantage of this analysis, with reference to the petroleum industry for instance, is the extent to which the oil firms (TNCs mainly) have tried to internalize not just the moment of the circuit of commodity capital, but the whole of the sphere of exchange as well, through their control of the industry down to the retail points. Furthermore we can -as Elson and Morgan & Hooper intend- theorize the different strength of factions within management in terms of the crisis that the unit of capital currently faces. A crisis of realization may strengthen the Accountant-faction within the management hierarchy, while the reverse may diminish it.<sup>16</sup> This however must rest on the understanding that the three circuits are moments in the metamorphosis of capital (Capital II Part 1), not fragmented and different capitals. A consequent of this problem is that Morgan & Hooper (1987) tend to assume -as Littler & Salaman (1982) did- that currency or stock market speculation creates new value. The only way short-dated gilts investment can yield new value is for the money to function as interest-bearing capital. In which case the relation between the investing company's money-capital and the borrowing firm is a relation of distribution. The new value having been produced in a different circuit.

The third main -and most widespread- problem in the LPD concerns the mis-reading of the method and categories of abstraction. This is also a feature of the review

<sup>16</sup> My gratitude to Peter Nolan (IRRU-Warwick) in helping me work out this argument. I alone am, of course, responsible for the form of its presentation here, which may not adequately reflect Peter's position.

above. Let us take the method of abstraction as a case. As Burawoy (1984:11) notes, the understanding of labour process is crucial for our 'understanding the relationship between labor and politics'. He proceeds to attack Marx's evolving analysis of the capitalist labour process as 'paving the way for a particular meta-history'(ibid).<sup>17</sup> Two aspects of the method that Burawoy failed to grasp are; first, the one-sided abstraction with which Marx teased out the differentia specifica of the capitalist labour process, by first examining the labour process 'in its simple and abstract elements' (Marx 1976:290). Secondly, it is in understanding that a labour process (independent of every form of society) is a 'purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values', that Marx identified the specific nature of the capitalist labour process. In other word, that apart from being a 'purposeful activity' it is also 'a process of creating value' (1976:293): commodity production. And that it is under capitalism that the direct producer -the worker- first emerges as a bearer of the commodity: labour-power. For an analysis of a peripheral capitalist situation the distinction of what is historically specific about capitalist production is extremely significant. Also significant for later discussion is that it is on the basis of this mis-reading that Burawoy rationalizes his technicist thesis of 'relations in production'.

A case of failure to appreciate the distinct meaning of the categories of abstraction in Marx's Capital is Cressey & MacInnes's (1980). They rightly attempt to theorize the contradictory relations between workers and their employers -in terms of spontaneous aggregation of interest between them and the antagonism between them- by anchoring it on the duality of the labour process. However they took Marx's distinction between the 'Real' and 'Formal Subsumption of Labour'(RSL, FSL) in Capital (also implicit in LMC) as the 'theoretical ancestry' of the inability of 'marxists' to theorize the contradictory worker/capitalist relations. Cressey & MacInnes (mis-) interpreted RSL as the total subordination of the worker. They substituted the category of 'labour' for worker. While in main-stream Industrial Relations and work sociology, 'labour' is used as a syn-

<sup>17</sup> A tendency in Burawoy's work is to throw barbs at Marx for every reference made to him. This often results from misreading Marx. Burawoy, for instance, thinks that for Marx 'the separation of state and civil society' (1985:254) is the distinct feature of capitalism. Marx must have remained, for ever, a Left-Hegelian!. This tendency also derives, I believe, from conducting discussion on an apologetic agenda: you have to throw bricks at Marx to show bourgeois academics you are not dogmatic.



onym for workers or their collective organization, Cressey & MacInnes imposed this reading of 'labour' on Marx's work.<sup>18</sup> For Marx, labour means 'purposeful, production activity' (1981:964) or 'an expenditure of human labour-power' (1976:137), a use also evident in LMC (Ch.1). FSL therefore describes a situation where capital 'takes over an existing labour process developed by different or more archaic modes of production' (Marx 1976:1021, italics in original).<sup>19</sup> In the same way that for instance UAC as commercial capital related to cocoa peasant farmers in Nigeria (see Chapter 3). The defining basis is that the taking over of the direction of production by capital does not 'affect the character of the actual labour process, the actual mode of working' (Marx 1976:1021).

The RSL on the other hand involves 'the development of a specifically capitalist mode of production' (p.1021) in which the capitalist not only owns the means of production but organizes and regulates the labour process. 'Based on this, and simultaneously with it, the corresponding relations of production between the various agents of production and above all between the capitalist and the wage-labourer, come into being for the first time' (p.1024, italics in original). This entails all the other dimensions of capitalist production I emphasized earlier. It is important to realize that in addition to the failure to comprehend the method of abstraction involving the specification of the distinct form of capitalist labour process, is also the presupposition in Cressey & MacInnes that one can read Marx -and Braverman- with the vocabulary of bourgeois social science.

The confusion over 'labour', the failure to recognize the distinction Marx makes between 'labour' and 'labour-power' are quite common in the LPD -evident in Burawoy above. Yet it is on the basis of this distinction that Marx broke with classical political economy and problematized the sphere of production as the engine room of capital's valorization, and not the market-place (Nicolaus 1973; Clarke 1977, 1982; Mandel 1976, 1978). This is also the basis of separating Marx's analysis from bourgeois social science. The problem in the LPD is the inadequate appreciation of the importance of the distinc-

<sup>18</sup> The cruel twist of LPD is that Cressey & MacInnes's piece has become the basis on which many LPDers read -and throw invectives at- Braverman and Marx. Further discussion in section 2 below.

<sup>19</sup> Although the BLPG (1977:7) peg FSL to the emergence of labour-power as a commodity, it is clear in Resultate that the relation of the production activity to capital, not labour-power, is for Marx, the defining characteristic of FSL (1976:1019-34).

tion. The list of the eclectic mis-use and mis-reading is probably endless, but an awareness of this problem is crucial in any effort to overcome the impasse of the LPD and extend the analytical insights in Braverman and Marx to our analysis of work and production relations in the contemporary context. This is more so in a peripheral capitalist context where an anthropological/Weberian perspective of work relations is prevalent. My emphasis on delineating the eclectic crisis in the LPD is therefore not idle preoccupation with concepts, but crucial for the location of production relations in the specific peripheral capitalism context.

### Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have tried to outline the most important developments in the analysis and theorizing within the LPD. The 'debate' as I have shown is not just stalemated, if that is what it is, but largely being conducted between schools of thought which share very little in common. Labour process, is central to Marx and marxist analysis of production process and relations of production. To grasp it and the categories that are often bandied along with it, it is important to understand the method and categories of abstraction. If Burawoy's analytic procedure shows greater potential than most, its major flaw would be both its rigid structuralism and dis-membering the 'realms' of reproduction from the 'labour process' and dialectical connection of the 'sphere of production' with the total social formation. Attention needs to be paid to production relations -at the point of production- and the more intricate and complex forms of expression and articulation of resistance, as well as reassertion and enhancement of the control of production process in dialectical fashion.

If in this review I have neglected the discussion on 'deskilling', it is because it is of limited value for my project in this study but more significantly because I believe 'deskilling' represent one of the worse cases of mis-reading in the LPD. Braverman never used it, and as far as I can gather deskilling is an invention of Elger (1977, 1979, 1982). Few if any of those who read Braverman from the point of view of the analysis of skill, have ever engaged with his Chapter 20: 'A Final Note on Skill' (1974).



ANNEX 2.1.  
TYPES OF FACTORY REGIMES.

Institutional Relationship between Apparatuses of Factory and of State.			
Intervention of State in Factory Regime	Direct	Separation	Fusion
		HEGEMONIC	BUREAUCRATIC DESPOTIC
	Indirect	MARKET DESPOTIC	COLLECTIVE SELF-MANAGE- MENT

Source: Burawoy (1985, p.12)

ANNEX 2.2.  
FACTORY REGIMES UNDER ADVANCED CAPITALISM.

State Support for the Reproduction of Labour Power.			
Direct State Regulation of Factory Regime	HIGH	HIGH Sweden	LOW United States
	LOW	England	Japan

Source: Burawoy (1985, p.138).

### Chapter 3.

#### NIGERIA: economy, state & society.

##### Introduction.

This chapter as an introductory part of this work serves two purposes. First, for readers unfamiliar with Nigeria, it provides general information on the country. Second, it puts the more general arguments in the following chapters in perspective. In particular the nature of Nigerian politics and economy is described. Given the introductory nature of this chapter, I can only deal with these issues in broad terms, while focusing on one or two specific aspects.

The chapter is divided into three broad parts. The first provides, in broad strokes, an over-view of state and politics in Nigeria right into 1987. The second part puts the developments in the economy in perspective, in their implications for the development of an emergent capitalist class and workers and workers' organizations. The final part, doubling as a concluding note, examines some theoretical issues of the economy, state and politics in Nigeria. It is important to emphasize that the distinction being made between state, politics, economy and (civil-) society made in this chapter is purely analytical.

##### 3.1. State, politics & Society.

The lowering of the British flag in Lagos, on October 1, 1960 marked a watershed in Nigerian history. Over a century earlier, the British naval bombardment<sup>1</sup> of the coastal town of Eko (Lagos), virtually destroying the town, marked the beginning of formal colonial destruction of the autonomy of peoples and territories of the area later designated Nigeria. The assault on Eko also marked the end of centuries of autonomous mercantilist relations between Europeans and indigenous elements along the coastal areas, based first on commodity, then slavery and finally agricultural sourcing for

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<sup>1</sup> As Coleman (1963, p.42) notes, this was 'ostensibly for the purpose of stopping the slave trade. For twenty years this [in]famous slave mart was successfully under the jurisdiction of the [British]'.



capitalist production in Britain.<sup>2</sup> The declaration of Lagos as a British Colony in 1861, was followed by five decades of violent military invasions and colonization. For the period 1886 to 1900, this task was 'contracted out' to the Royal Niger Company, which combined mercantile-capitalist activities with colonial-state powers on behalf of 'Her Majesty's Government'. The British state from 1900 onward took formal control of the colonial venture.

The pattern of colonization produced two separate components in the emergent Nigerian polity. Two separate colonial bureaucracies for northern and southern Nigeria emerged after 1900. In the 'protectorate' of Northern Nigeria, an area covering the present Kwara and Benue and other states north of the Niger and Benue river (see Map), the colonial bureaucracy was erected on the emirate bureaucracy of the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>3</sup> This system was called 'indirect rule', i.e. the use of indigenous political processes as buffer between colonial officials and the indigenes. In the 'protectorate' of Southern Nigeria<sup>4</sup>, attempts were made to reproduce the structure in the North.

While the caliphate (and the Kanem-Borno)<sup>5</sup> North, had a highly centralized bureaucracy in existence before colonization -down to the village level for tax-collection, military and administrative purposes-, in most parts of contemporary Nigeria, this was not the case. In most of Eastern Nigeria, the Benue and Plateau states, for instance the idea of a pre-eminent chieftain was alien. Even in the south-west, Benin, Onitsha and Calabar areas with what seemed like monarchies, chiefs or 'kings' were accountable to lineage or ward heads and the people in the domain as well as being subject to removal. In areas without chiefs, the colonialists invented them; a famous example is the case of Warrant Chiefs in eastern Nigeria (Afigbo 1972). Even in areas with chieftains the nature of political relations was fundamentally altered. Chiefs had to supply people for forced

<sup>2</sup> Vide Dike (1956), Ikime (1968) and Hopkins (1972).

<sup>3</sup> The 19th century Sokoto Caliphate was the empire-building antecedent of the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio. The Caliphate which was already in decline at the time of the British colonial invasion, covered only a limited part of the area later designated the 'Protectorate of Northern Nigeria' even at its peak.

<sup>4</sup> At various times the area was referred to as 'Lagos and Colony' (roughly same area as Lagos State) and formed part of the 'Protectorate of Southern Nigeria'.

<sup>5</sup> The Kanem-Borno empire dates back to the 14th century and it covered the areas of north-eastern Nigeria, parts of the Republics of Niger, Chad and the Cameroun.

labour and aid in collecting taxes. Personal taxation or forced labour was in most parts entirely alien.<sup>6</sup> Political office holders now owed their positions to the colonial officials rather than their peoples. In some cases 'chiefdoms' were dramatically altered. In south-western Nigeria for instance, the Alake of Ake -head of the Ake ward, one of the federated Egba wards- became the 'Alake of Egbaland'.

Put simply, colonialism redefined political relations, appropriated socio-political processes and hampered popular controls from 'below' on those holding political power. The effect was a disengagement of the colonial -and the post-colonial- State and political society from the civil-society. In the caliphate North on the other hand, the preservation of traditional bureaucracies and the constraint on non-Islamic educational and religious activities combined to limit the disengagement of state and civil-society.<sup>7</sup> While in Northern Nigerian, the post-1950 indigenous 'political class'<sup>8</sup> emerged from within the colonial/traditional political process, in the Middle-Belt and Southern Nigeria it developed from without.

The other dimension of the colonial state, was the complete separation of the northern Nigerian bureaucracy from that of southern Nigeria. The effect was an introspective and provincial political process that was largely ethnic based. The emphasis after 1939 was decidedly regionalist; it sowed the seed of a bitter harvest. In addition, the relations between the indigenous chiefs and colonial bureaucracy were as much decided by the latter's possession of armed violence as by the fact that colonial rule halted what was the terminal decline of many of the 'kingdoms' and 'empires'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Personal tax, outside Kanem-Borno and the Caliphate, was alien to most of 'Nigeria'. The payment of tributes -in kind- to chiefs and kings was common in some areas, but this was often lineage-group, rather than, individual based.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between 'State' and 'Civil Society' is in the same methodological sense as Gramsci's (1971 pp.5-23 & pp.245-6). See Sasson (198372-74).

<sup>8</sup> I use the concept 'political class' warily and in descriptive terms. The heterogeneity of this social bloc -educated petty bourgeoisie, petty-capitalists, mercantilists, neo-feudal functionaries, etc.- means their quest for (or holding of ) political office is the only basis of any coherent identity.

<sup>9</sup> The territory 'Nigeria' may be a product of colonialism but the effect of the latter was to freeze-out the rapid changes that were occurring in the 19th century; -the Caliphate, the Oyo politico-military empire and others were in terminal decline. It is difficult to speculate on what the end of this process, barring colonialism, would have been.



### 3.1.2. Decolonization and Nation-State.

When Nnamdi Azikiwe declared in 1960 that Nigeria got its independence 'on a platter of gold' (Dudley 1982:57) he expressed the sentiment of the emergent 'political class'; for a greater majority of Nigerians, the experience was different. From the thousands who died in resisting the colonization process to hundreds killed or maimed resisting colonial domination, the experience was different.

Opposition to colonialism -and its implications for people- remained a recurrent feature, from the armed uprising around Sokoto<sup>10</sup> in 1906, to the Egba and Aba uprisings of 1918 and 1929 respectively.<sup>11</sup> Each uprising was as much against the colonialist as their indigenous subalterns. The demand for an end to imperialist domination was central to all the uprisings. If the 1909 armed revolt of the Gwari people (Mason:1978) was partly against forced labour, the opposition of the emergent working class to colonialism was more permanent and organizationally coherent. (Hughes & Cohen: 1978, Ananaba:1969). The readiness to take 'positive action' distinguished workers, artisans or peasant opposition from that of the emergent petty-bourgeoisie. As Hopkins (1966/1979), Hughes & Cohen (1978), have pointed out, the moment workers took to direct action (e.g. strike) the petty-bourgeois elements would rail condemnation on the workers. Either distance themselves from the workers' action or(/and) move in support to the colonialists. The intensification of anti-colonial opposition after the 1930s was again led by workers and youth/student organizations (Coleman 1963, Olusanya 1973), with the educated petty-bourgeoisie intermittently hopping onto the band-wagon. Neither the shooting of striking workers in Burutu in June 1947 nor the November 1949 mass murder of the Iva Valley coal miners by the colonial police produced any shift in the tactics of the emergent

<sup>10</sup> The revolt focused around Satiru and Hadeija villages. The British forces responded by destroying villages and mass deportation of the inhabitants, as in the case of the Gussoro revolt three years later. These are aspects of the 'strategic villages' campaign used later by the British in Kenya in the 1950s and the US forces in Vietnam.

<sup>11</sup> Both the Egba and Aba uprisings were sparked off by tax imposition. Ifeka-Moller (1975) -vide Carley (1982)- explores the crippling destruction of community relations and power of women within the traditional Igbo society as the background to the 'Aba riot'. This stands in contrast to the conventional wisdom which sees the uprising as a tax riot or worst still a bunch of savages running amok!. c.f Coleman (1963:174-5).

petty-bourgeois 'nationalists'. The notion of an independence won either on the platter of gold or for the nation by the petty-bourgeoisie remain a myth, if an enduring one.

The formation of the NCNC<sup>12</sup> in 1944, at the inspiration of the Nigerian Union of Students, neither fulfilled the hope of a unified national liberation movement nor a radical shift from the reformist politics of the indigenous petty-bourgeoisie. The latter for five decades had been more interested in its acceptance by and participation in the colonial structure, than by the essence of imperialist domination. Its complaints against the colonialists were defined in those terms. This too became the dominant posture of the NCNC leadership. It is within this context that one understands the complicity of the NCNC leaders in the face of colonial repression of the cadre of the Zikist Movement<sup>13</sup> who were advocating a national liberation struggle (Okoye 1979). They were not only condemned but expelled from the NCNC. The devolution process of the post-1945 opened the avenue for the emergent 'political class'. As well as becoming averse to radical politics, all talks of a pan-Nigerian identity disappeared behind the regionalist -often ethnocentric- cocoon. A congruity of interest with the British colonialist and the emergent indigenous 'political class' was given firm basis during 1952-60 period. Not only in the political fragmentation of the country along ethno-regional lines but also the (peripheral) capitalist direction of the economy.

By 1960 when formal political independence was declared, three dominant parties had erected themselves in each of the three regions of the country; the Northern Peoples Congress in the Northern region, the Action Group and the NCNC in the Western and Eastern regions.<sup>14</sup> A motley of other parties were also in existence often around ethno-

<sup>12</sup> The 'National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons'. After southern Cameroons became part of the Republic of Cameroons, the 'the Cameroons' component was changed to 'Citizens'.

<sup>13</sup> The Zikist Movement, founded in early 1946, was initially based on the defense and celebration of the personality of Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose anti-colonial rhetorics were mistaken by many of the young radicals, for anti-imperialist commitment. The movement from 1947-50, took a more militant anti-imperialist line. Some advocated armed struggle. Many of its cadres were tried and imprisoned between 1948 and 1950, when it was proscribed. The Freedom Movement which succeeded the Zikist Movement, met with as much hostility from the indigenous petty-bourgeoisie as from the colonial state.

<sup>14</sup> See Coleman (1963), Dudley (1968), Osuntokun (1987) on the nature and emergence of the NPC, Coleman (1963) Olusanya (1973) and Post & Jenkins (1973), on the developments before 1960. Post (1963) on the 1959 election. Kirk-Greene



regional (UMBC, BYM and UNIP) or populist agenda (NEPU).<sup>15</sup> The NPC emerged from the 1959 election as the largest party in the Federal parliament, in Lagos, and in ruling coalition with the NCNC.

### 3.1.3. Politics, state & society: 1960-1966.

The crisis that engulfed the 'First Republic' -as the 1960/66 period came to be known- has two dimensions. One internal to the emergent 'political class', the other a product of the "people's agenda".<sup>16</sup> For a social bloc committed to a vaguely defined capitalist enterprise but which acquired political power prior to its becoming a propertied class, politics became the means of the realisation of the class objective. Acquisition and retention of state-power became central to individual socio-economic survival. But this had to contend with the agenda of the dominated classes in the society, for whom political independence needed to have better meaning than having the indigenous personnel take over the positions vacated by the British. These crises surfaced right after independence.

In 1962, the crisis within the AG which had been brewing within the party -following its exclusion from state power at the national level- boiled over in the Western Region. The party broke into factions, with the region's Premier and deputy party leader - S.L. Akintola- leading one faction and the party's leader and leader of the Opposition at the Federal legislature -Obafemi Awolowo- leading another. The attempt to impeach the regional Premier led to a full-scale crisis, with the latter's faction holding on to power by forming first a coalition and later a new political party (NNDP)<sup>17</sup> with the NCNC members in the regional parliament. The NNDP in power resorted, as did the dominant parties in other regions, to the repression of its opponents. The effect in the Western region was,

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(1971), Dudley (1971, 1982), Cohen (1974), Osoba (1976), Williams (1976, 1980) for general discussions.

<sup>15</sup> UMBC and BYM, were formed in opposition to perceived Hausa-Fulani domination of 'the minority nationalities in Northern Nigeria. The UNIP was formed by elements from the present Cross Rivers and Rivers state in opposition to perceived Ibo domination in the Eastern region. The NEPU, although marooned in the north was predominantly populist party -on the side of the poor and against neo-feudal domination.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis is owed to Ola Oni, the Nigerian marxist.

<sup>17</sup> This NNDP should not to be confused with the NNDP formed in Lagos, in 1923 and led by Herbert Macaulay.



as in many areas of the other regions, a government that was in control of state power but whose legitimacy in the civil-society was non-existent.

At the national level the increasing squabble for political control and access to public offices led to the increased resort to ethno-centric appeal in securing state and economic resources.<sup>18</sup> The effect was the collapse of the NPC-NCNC coalition by 1964. The electoral re-alignment for the 1964 and 1965 elections and the conduct of the elections took the country in a downward spiral of instability. The military coup of January 1966 brought the civilian regimes to an end.

The second dimension of the crisis is what I called the people's agenda. Any hope that political independence would mean a re-organisation of socio-economic life faded within the first two years. This was amply demonstrated by the 1964 General Strike. The threat by workers to disrupt the ceremony of proclaiming Nigeria a republic, in October 1963 led to a pledge by the Federal Government to set up a commission of enquiry which would examine the workers' grievances. The refusal of the government to release the report of commission or act on it led to the general strike. It is however not so much in the demands made in September 1963, -which Cohen (1974:168) notes may be sectional- but in the sense that the strike involved the working class organizations in expressing the demands and grievances of other subordinate classes (Kirk-Greene 1971:20). This phenomenon of organizational links with, and expression of the grievance of other subordinate classes, dates back to the colonial period (Ananaba 1969, Cohen 1970, Williams & Turner 1980).

On another plane, the 1960 and 1964 uprisings in the mainly Tiv areas of the North, reflect issues that are at once national and class. For the non-muslim, non-Hausa/Fulani nationalities in the Northern region, their political and cultural suppression, established under the British regime, -e.g. making Hausa language the lingua-franca in the Northern region- was intensified by the NPC regime. Added to this was the violent repression of NPC's political opponents; the uprisings also reflected a largely peasant concern, on taxation, etc. The 1964 Tiv revolt coincided with the increasingly violent re-

<sup>18</sup> Vide Dudley (1982:62-3) on the distribution of development projects under the 1962-68 Plan, Kirk-Greene (1971:19-20), Williams & Turner (1980:76-8) on the 1963 census and squabbles for public posts.



sistance against the NNDP government in the Western region. The crisis was worsened in 1965 by the regional government's reduction of the produce price paid to cocoa farmers.(Williams 1980a) This was in an attempt to deal with its budgetary crisis following mass refusal to pay tax. As Williams & Turner note 'the violence did not simply involve people in the politics of resource allocation. It was also a popular rejection of the rule of the politicians' (1980: 86, Post & Vickers 1973). A rule which ended in January 1966.

#### 3.1.4. Nigeria Under Military Rule.

While the coup was inspired by radical populism (Ademoyega: 1981), its execution was to deepen the crisis. The Prime Minister, two premiers (of the Northern and Western regions), a number of politicians and senior military officers were killed. While the coup in the Northern region was an initial success, it collapsed within hours in the southern regions in spite of mass support for the coup. Although the coup was squashed and the senior military commanders invited the Federal Ministers to resume power, the latter declined. Unable to guarantee the survival of the state, the 'political class' abdicated control to the coercive arm of the state. To see the formal handing over of power to the military as a product of the military hierarchy leaning on the civilians, implicit in Kirk-Greene's (1971:36) narrative, is to miss the significance of this crisis. However the mainly ethnic-Ibo composition of the planners and the fact that those killed in the coup were mainly non-Ibos was to cause the lasting crisis.

The military under Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi assumed power. However the move from regional autonomy to centralized state structure, the perceived domination of Ironsi's kitchen cabinet by ethnic-Ibos and the claim that the officers responsible for the coup were not tried, in the atmosphere of heightened regional chauvinism, precipitated a military mutiny on 29 July 1966<sup>19</sup> in which the victims were mainly ethnic-Ibos. Out the crisis emerged Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon as the new military Head of State. The mutiny and the spate of regional hatred and attacks in the Northern and Eastern regions against indigenes of the other region led directly to the most tragic

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<sup>19</sup> The military mutiny followed outbreaks of violence at the end of May in the Northern Region in protest to the unitary government proposal and against ethnic-Ibos resident in the region.



phase in the Nigeria's history, the 1967-70 civil war.<sup>20</sup> Between 1966 and 1970 however the political terrain of the country was significantly altered. First the country was divided into 12 states in place of the 4 regions, however this time the central (Federal) government emerged as a strong power. In the political vacuum created particularly between 1966 and 1968 the top echelon of the Federal Civil Service emerged as a strong political force. Between January 1966 and June 1977, the top policy making body; the Federal Executive Council (FEC) was made up of Federal Permanent Secretaries, alongside Ironsi and later Gowon. In the post-1967 period, and along with the bureaucrats, emerged a motley of state functionaries, mainly petty-bourgeois; academics, professionals, and military officers in ministerial positions.

The 1970s, with the civil war ended, also saw a dramatic change in the economic position of the country. While in 1966 the contribution of petroleum to a total Federal revenue of 339.2 million naira was 37.7 million (11.1%)<sup>21</sup> by 1970 petroleum contribution was 196.4 million naira to a total revenue of 758.1 million naira (25.9%). By 1975 however, petroleum accounted for 78.7% (4,611.7 million naira) of a total revenue of 5,861.6 million. By the end of the decade, petroleum accounted for 81.4% (8,880.9 million) of a total Federal revenue of 10,913.1 million naira. The centrality of the State to the economy, revenue accumulation, class creation, resource allocation and hence the premium on the retention of state power was never so acute.

Although the Gowon regime pledged in October 1970 to return the country to civil rule within 6 years, it became clear by 1973 that the emergent civil/military bureaucratic bloc was intent on institutionalizing its domination of the state apparatus.<sup>22</sup> In October 1974, Gowon pronounced a return to civil rule 'unrealistic'. If the opposition of the fragments of the dominant bloc -outside the State- to the attempt at making permanent the 'reigning' faction's domination of the State was a problem for the regime, it was its loss of legitimacy in the civil-society which was its ruin. By 1975, the rampant corru-

<sup>20</sup> The Eastern Region's predominantly ethnic-Ibo fragment of the dominant bloc, declared a break-away Republic of Biafra.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Ministry of Finance (1979) cited in Ohiorhenuan (1983:13)

<sup>22</sup> Vide Dudley (1982:85:100). Alison Ayida, a senior Federal Permanent Secretary made it known in 1973 in his Presidential address to the Nigerian Economic Society conference in Zaria. 'The Nigerian Revolution 1966-76'. I will expatiate on the category 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' in the next section.



ption, the state funded growth of a lumpen-bourgeoisie -on the oil revenue- in the midst of urban and rural poverty, the increasing resort of the ruling faction to repression of its critics had brought workers, the student movement and other social groups in incessant revolts against the government.<sup>23</sup> On July 29, 1975 the Gowon regime was overthrown in a coup.

The new regime led by Brigadier (later General) Murtala Mohammed<sup>24</sup> came to power on an anti-corruption 'ticket', a promise to tighten up 'the sloppiness of the Gowon regime',<sup>25</sup> and a return to civil rule in 1979. The top echelon of the civil service was a prime target of the regime (Turner 1978, Dudley 1982). In February 1976, the current 19-state structure was announced by the regime (vide Yahaya 1978). Although Mohammed was killed in a coup attempt the same month -and his deputy, Obasanjo, succeeded him as the new Head of State-, the process of returning the country to civil rule and the broad program of the regime was adhered to. (Panter-Brick 1978, Dudley 1982:125-225)

### 3.1.5. The Civilian Interregnum.

The military at the National day ceremony of October 1, 1979 formally handed over power to a civilian government. A US-type Presidential system had been adopted in the 1979 Constitution in contrast to the Cabinet-type system of the pre-1966 period. Five political parties also fielded in the August elections. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP). A combination of class and ethno-regional alliances formed the basis of the parties. For instance NPN emerged as an alliance of capitalist, mercantilist and neo-feudal bloc, with NPC pedigree. The UPN, that of petty-capitalist, petty-bourgeois elements with strong AG pedigree, while the PRP was of predominant radical petty-bourgeois and peasant re-emer-

<sup>23</sup> See Turner (1978) for an incisive account of the developing crisis within the Supreme Military Council. However, I think she over-emphasized this process at the expense of the wider processes in society. The confrontations in the SMC were indicative of these wider processes. Vide Dudley (1982:Ch.4) on the aspect of the revolt from the a Northern fragment of the dominant bloc not in control of state power.

<sup>24</sup> Mohammed and his deputy Brigadier (later Lt. General) Olusegun Obasanjo were members of Gowon's cabinet.

<sup>25</sup> This involved a more aggressive and coherent effort at promoting capitalist development. See below.



gence of NEPU (Richard 1978). In the elections, the NPN won the Presidency and executive control of 7 states; the UPN, five states; NPP, three states; and GNPP and PRP, two states each. In alliance with the NPP, the NPN also took control of the National Assembly.

Perhaps the most enduring experience of the '2nd Republic' is the extent to which it reproduced the worst of the Gowon and the 1960-66 regimes. This include the flagrant expropriation of national revenue and the flaunting of new found wealth in an environment of open and blatant corruption. A situation helped by the rise of oil prices to a giddy \$44.35 per barrel (official posted price) in January 1981, and massive internal and external borrowing when the bottom later fell out of the oil market. The Federal revenue, from oil, under the NPN regime totaled between 48.24 billion and 53.48 billion naira.<sup>26</sup> This is over 52% of total oil-based revenue for over 2 decades. Even the 'depression years' of 1982 and 1983 as Bangura (1984:6-7) notes, saw 24 billion naira in Federal revenue, double the amount for the 'boom years' of 1974 to 1976. In the midst of steep rises in food prices, state governments not paying salaries for months, etc., the level of conspicuous consumption of the emergent 'political class' continued relentlessly. Purchase of private jets, designer champagne (with personalized label) was the order of the day. The flagrant expropriation of national revenue cut across party boundaries, but it was a social cess-pool most typified by the NPN (vide Falola & Ihonvbere 1985, Nzeribe 1985, Forrest 1986). Wiping up religious, ethnic and regional chauvinism was also an enduring aspect of the period.

It was the elections of 1983 which served as the final straw on the national camel's back. The massive electoral malpractice across the country brought violent revolts in many areas, many of which were brutally put down; the NPN not only retained power at the Federal level but 'gained' five new states. If before the election, it was the economy

<sup>26</sup> The uncertainty of the real value is a result of the different figures emanating from different sources. Bangura (1984:7), quoting the National Concord, puts the figure at 53.48 billion naira. Figures from the NNPC itself are not helpful. Two different MDs of the Corporation gave three different figures for 1980 on as many occasions, i.e. Marinho (1984:20), 12.448 billion naira, Marinho (1985:38), 13.523 billion naira and Amu (1982:29), 13.123 billion. The Financial Times, (3/3/86 p.vii) on the other hand puts the figure at \$25 billion (or 16.404 billion naira: Exchange Rate of 1 naira= US \$1.524).



which was threatened, the post-election scenario threatened the very survival of the state. Three months after the (new) federal and state governments were sworn in -and five months after a senior NPN politician<sup>27</sup> declared the start of the rule of a thousand years- the military struck again on 31 December 1983.

### 3.1.6. The Return of the Military.

Although the coup was greeted with, perhaps, a national sigh of relief, it reflected the crisis within the dominant bloc and the 'Kaduna Mafia'<sup>28</sup> is believed behind the coup. The downward spiral of the economy and the very survival of the state, its loss of control of the NPN, being some of the alleged key worries of the its members. The economy itself was in a terrible state: from a trade surplus of over two billion naira in 1980, the deficit in 1983 was nearly 300 million naira. The external debt was estimated at between 18.46 and 21.38 billion naira, up 989.2% on 1980 figure. The internal debt stood at 22.2 billion naira against 1980 figure of 7.9 billion naira. The economy became the primary issue. The regime responded by reining hard on importation, retrenchment of public sector employees, cuts in public expenditure and demands of sacrifice from the citizens. These were elements of the 'Economic Stabilization Program' of the civilian regime, but which had neither the will nor the discipline and the legitimacy to implement it.

Having defined the crisis of the country in terms of lack of discipline in the national life, the regime moved in with a War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign. Although the campaign was attempting to tap into the civil-society for its new agenda, its explanation was based on blaming everyone, except the military, for the crisis. Discipline was defined in militaristic terms. Whilst it instituted various judicial panels to investigate the politicians, the regime's capacity to deal with corruption was questionable from the start, given the fact that most of its members -though military men- were themself-

<sup>27</sup> Umaru Dikko, during a Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) election program in 1983.

<sup>28</sup> See Othman (1985) and Bangura (1986:30). The 'Kaduna Mafia', so-called because it grew up around Kaduna, the former Northern Region region's capital, emerged out of the crisis of 1966/67 and the civil war as the main proponent of 'Northern interest'. Its members are mainly (northern/muslim) ex-civil servants, academics, retired military officers and commercial and agricultural capitalists bred within the framework of Ahmadu Bello's (the Regional Premier of the North and leader of) NPC.



ves suspect. The effect of the regime's economic policies, (continued soaring inflation and massive job losses), its heightened authoritarian response to criticism and opposition, and its coercive notion of 'discipline', marked its epitaph. The trade union movement, the Press, student organizations and the academic community became the regime's early victims. However the increasing personalization of state power by the regime's Head of State (Major General Mohammed Buhari) and his deputy (Major General Tunde Idiagbon) -and a small group built around them- brought them in confrontation with other members of the regime. In August 1985, the latter struck in a palace coup. A significant aspect of the palace coup was the question of the economic crisis of the country, i.e. whether or not to accept the IMF demands for 'restructuring' the economy. This was also a condition demanded by the western capitalist financial agencies for rescheduling outstanding trade debts and resuming insurance cover for trading with Nigeria.

The new group, led by Major General Ibrahim Babangida, had to respond to the crisis of legitimacy of its ex-regime; the economy and the future of military rule. In addition to pledging to respect 'human rights' (under which 'amnesty' was granted to the operatives of the '2nd Republic'), the regime sanctioned a 'national debate' on the IMF issue and later set up a panel to coordinate discussions on the future form of civil rule. The resounding result of the 'debate' on the IMF was a national rejection of the conditions. However the regime went on to implement the same IMF demands under the guise of a 'home-grown' Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which was launched in 1986. This meant further reduction in public spending, privatization of public assets, the deregulation of import/export processes and a currency devaluation of over 550%.<sup>29</sup> In early 1987 the regime outlined a program of transition to civil rule to be completed in October 1992. Like other military regimes, the 'human right' regime is increasingly responding to criticism from the country with repression and controlled 'public debate'. And as always, the trade union and student movements, and the academic community are the primary targets.

<sup>29</sup> In March 1985, for instance, the exchange rate was 1 Naira=US\$1.336, by August 1987 it was 4.12 Naira=US\$1. (FT 24/2/86, p.i and West Africa, 7/9/87, p.1750 respectively)



### 3.2. Economy, Class & Society.

In this section I will outline the major developments in the economy and class relations of contemporary Nigeria. As I mentioned earlier, the distinction between politics and economy is only analytical.

The broad outlines of the contemporary Nigerian economy, its co-optation into the international capitalist economy was established under colonialism. The formal subsumption of agrarian production to British mercantile capital created a peasant economy producing cash-crops for the British capitalist market.<sup>30</sup> Alongside the cash-crop producing peasantry was the indigenous mercantilist class. The latter group had flourished in most areas of Nigeria prior to colonial domination. In the latter period however the mercantile class experienced a very volatile relation with foreign mercantilist capital. Prior to first colonialism and later the development of railways and the road networks, the indigenous trading elements had established relations of relative independence with the (mainly) British trading firms. A combination of the accessibility of the country to the latter, depressions of 1919-22 and 1929-33, monopolistic practices of the British firms under the patronage and protection of the colonial state, had imposed a monopoly of import and export business in the country.<sup>31</sup> This not only eroded the independence of the indigenous merchant elements but threatened their existence. The UAC<sup>32</sup> in 1930 for instance, controlled 40% of produce buying and export trade, and by the 1940s the trend was consolidated with the establishment of Marketing Boards and the granting of a monopoly over produce buying and export to the British firms operating in the country. In 1949, 6 firms in the -mainly British- Association of West African Merchants controlled 66% of Nigeria's import, and 70% of export, trade. The effect was a marginalized indigenous mercantilist class.

<sup>30</sup> See Helleiner (1966), Forrest (1980), Williams (1980, 1981, 1985) and Shenton & Freund (1978) for a wider discussion of this process.

<sup>31</sup> See Gertzel (1959) cited in Williams (1980), Hopkins (1972, 1979), Nnoli (1981b) and Onimode (1981a)

<sup>32</sup> The United Africa Company was the Niger Company (formerly Royal Nigeria Company) until its was acquired by Unilever in 1930. It dates back to the National African Company formed in 1879 as an amalgam of the British trading firms operating in the Niger areas. Between 1886 and 1900, and as the Royal Niger Company, it was given a Royal Charter, combining its mercantile capitalist role with an imperialist-colonial one on behalf of the British government. Today UAC remains the largest private capitalist firm in Nigeria.



A contrary trend was the emergence of the educated petty-bourgeois class. Its members were in the 19th century mainly located in Lagos or the colonial civil service, but by the 1950s, it had grown substantially in number but still mainly from Southern Nigeria. The homogeneity of this class is defined primarily by education, with a substantial proportion of its members involved in petty-capitalist activities.<sup>33</sup> It shared the economic marginalization of the indigenous mercantilist class although the political dimension was a more substantive and immediate problem for it. It is important to understand that underlining the broad vision of this class was a commitment to a consumerist bourgeois ethos. Its opposition to colonialism, as evident in the 1940s and the 1950s, was not so much the exploitative and general dehumanizing essence of imperialism, but to the implications for its members. Some of these in the 1940s expressed socialist ideas, but this was broadly Fabian rather than a commitment to a revolutionary restructuring of society. With the indigenous petty-capitalist and mercantilist class, the petty-bourgeoisie was a social bloc, all dressed-up and nowhere to go. The post-colonial era was to see the effort to translate the bourgeois ethos into concrete (class) terms.

The colonial-capitalist economy also led to the emergence of an indigenous working class whose creation had been induced by the use of forced labour and taxation. The rise of commodity labour-power reflects a wider process going on at the time.<sup>34</sup> As early as 1897, a strike provided the first glimpse of the character of the working class, setting it apart from the other social groups (Hopkins 1966/79, Hughes & Cohen 1978). The development of the railway also produced one of the more militant segments of this emergent working class. As Hughes & Cohen (1978) point out, although working class organizations had always looked towards the petty-bourgeoisie for support and political leadership, nonetheless the articulation of distinct working class interests was evident by the 1920s. It was the beginning of the militant-socialist tradition within the trade union movement.

<sup>33</sup> Macaulay, Azikiwe and Awolowo among others are typical of this strand of the petty-bourgeoisie.

<sup>34</sup> The latter involved in many areas the demise of indigenous productive (non-agrarian) capacity and in others their adaptation in face of imported mass-produced commodities, as well as the forced introduction of the British currency. See Hopkins (1966/1979), Hughes & Cohen (1978), Bray (1966) and Hill (1977) cited in Williams (1980:30-1)



The 1940s witnessed increased worker militancy culminating in the 1945 General Strike. At the same time, efforts at building a unified organization culminated in the formation of the TUCN in August 1943. Although the history of the trade union movement would be one of perennial schism and merger<sup>35</sup> (Ananaba 1969, Cohen 1974, Waterman 1982) the movement, as a working class force, remained the most consistent focus of opposition to the colonial and post-colonial states as expressions of indigenous and foreign capital.

### 3.2.1 State, Class & Economy: 1950-1980s.

The devolution process of 1952-60, was not just a political phenomenon. On the one hand, it meant the restructuring of the pattern of relations of the mainly British capital's relations with the state and the economy. Firms like the UAC began moving away from produce-buying into 'import-substitution' production ventures. This, as I will discuss later, represents a territorial extension of the sphere of production of the given unit of capital, rather than engendering capitalist development. In any case, the operations of such firms remain mainly commercial. Nonetheless it was a departure from the purely peasant-based extractive process of the past decades. In addition the foreign capitalist firms organised a unified platform and in 1957 the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA) was founded. NECA became the platform for coordinating the responses of the various units of capital to the State and the trade union movement<sup>36</sup> was by no means limited to industrial relations issues. These changes reflect the realization that the British colonial state would no longer be available to provide political protection.

However, the transfer of political power to the indigenous 'political class' was more than simply cosmetic. Relative to the colonial state, it was in a position to shop around different imperialist centres and transnationals. The latter by 1962 was evident in

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<sup>35</sup> Cohen (1974) and Waterman (1982) are correct in highlighting the significance of external financial and material supports to the union centres for the perennial disunity within the trade union movement. Nonetheless the ideological division is more than a convenient means of ensuring continuous external backing. The difference in tactics during the 1945 General Strike, the strength of feeling on the linkage of union and general political struggles after 1945, or the current politics within the NLC flow from fundamental ideological differences.

<sup>36</sup> See Fashoyin (1980:Ch.4) and Ubeku (1983:96-106) on the emergence and role of NECA.



the petroleum industry with the breaking of Shell-BP monopoly in the oil industry. However, the emergent 'political class' inherited an economy which was not only dominated by foreign capital but mainly non-industrial.<sup>37</sup> Peasant commodity production remained the principal basis for accumulation through the Marketing Boards. The 1st National Development Plan -drawn up with U.S. assistance- envisaged the provision of infrastructure to attract foreign capital. The promotion of import substituting ventures was adopted as the immediate form of capitalist development. Significant for a social bloc committed to capitalism was the absence of an indigenous capitalist class. But within this context the state was the 'guardian' and 'gate-keeper' of the national economy, vis-a-vis foreign capital, and internally the primary source of the allocation of resources. The latter involves both the provision of social services as well as development programs. The State not only had to guarantee the condition for accumulation, but also serve as the proxy for an absent class.

The intense competition for political or state-related posts in the 1960-65 period reflects this centrality of state and state-power. The 'over-politicization of social life'<sup>38</sup> and 'prebendal' politics -a euphemism for corruption- are not entirely outlandish within the context;<sup>39</sup> neither is the high premium on the retention of state power. However as evident in the series of peasant uprisings in the 1960s, particularly the Agbekoya revolt<sup>40</sup> in 1968-69 in Western Nigeria, there is a limit to an accumulation (or appropriation) process based on the expropriation of peasant producers.

In the 1970s two elements to the class/state/economy relations became evident. On the one hand, a rapid expansion in state investment in the economy, i.e. an expansion in state-directed capital or state-capital; and on the other hand, the State having to

<sup>37</sup> Kilby (1969:20) estimated that in 1964, 68% of all investments were foreign, 22% and 10% were by the state and private individuals respectively (Iyayi 1986:33). As Onimode (1981b:147) shows 'manufacturing' formed 3.6% of the GNP in 1960 and 5.6% in 1965. Both the concepts of GNP and 'Manufacturing' are suspect. If one defines the issue in terms of the valorized capital rather than circulation of value we will end up with a (different) lower figure.

<sup>38</sup> Ake's address to the 1981 Nigerian Political Science Association Conference. See West Africa, 25 May 1981, pp.1162-3, for excerpts (also in Richard (1983:21). See Ake (1985a,1985b) for a rigorous path to the same conclusion.

<sup>39</sup> See Richard (1983:30-5) for a 'theory of prebendal politics' in Nigeria. The concept is Weber's.

<sup>40</sup> Agbekoya, literally means 'farmers reject suffering'. See Beer (1975), Beer & Williams (1976) and Williams (1980b) for further discussion on the uprising.



guarantee indigenous participation in the economy. The demand for indigenous (equity) participation in existing enterprises was from 1968 most vocally expressed by the Nigerian Chambers of Commerce, a demand which found favourable audience in the National Planning Board -a government agency of academics and senior bureaucrats. In 1972 the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion (NEP) decree was promulgated, this decree reserved certain category of ventures for the indigenes. This ranged from non-departmental retail trading, road haulage to newspaper publishing. Schedule II of the decree demanded 40% indigenous equity participation in other areas of economic activities like wholesale distribution, brewery operation and manufacture of soaps.<sup>41</sup> The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Board was set up to monitor compliance with the decree. The Capital Issues Commission (now the Stock Exchange) arranged share valuation and trading. The Bank for Commerce and Industry financed the acquisition of shares or setting up firms, and series of seminars were organised and pamphlets produced on share acquisition and running a business, etc. Management training programs were set up with World Bank support (Beckman 1982). The 3rd National Development Plan claimed that by 1975 some 54 million units of shares had been acquired by indigenous elements (1975:19).

It is important to stress that, in spite of such problems as fraud and conflict between the foreign firms and the NEPB and CIC, which most studies (see Note 41) and a government commission in 1975 have documented, the process was one of a distinct bourgeoisie being created on the back of the state. The rhetorics of nationalism, as Beckman (1982:) notes, were being used in establishing an accommodative relation between the emergent indigenous bourgeoisie and international capital as well as institutionalize this relation. It was a class coming out of produce selling of the pre-1970s into direct capital ownership, a process underwritten by state revenue. It was the very argument of fraudulent activities in equity transfer that made the new Military regime in 1975 set up a judicial commission of inquiry into the indigenization program. In 1977, a new and more extensive NEP decree was promulgated. The asset limit and range of economic activities reserved for Nigerians were extended, 60% equity ownership was required for firms pre-

<sup>41</sup> See Nigerian Economic Society (1975), Hoogvelt (1979), Teriba & Kayode (1979), Eteng (1981), Nnoli (1981), Forrest (1982) and Ake (1985c), among others, for discussions on the 'Indigenization' process.



viously limited to 40%; and all other enterprises excluded in the 1972 decree were required to divest 40% of their equity.

However, the more significant element in the changing capitalist landscape of Nigeria was the increased state-capital investment in the economy. While divestment to an aspirant bourgeoisie would not expand capitalist activities (simply re-allocate it), state involvement was meant to do just that. The awareness of the absence of a viable capitalist class that could undertake expanded industrial activity and what Hutchful (1986:160) called the ideology of 'developmentalism', were the drive forces behind this line.<sup>42</sup> The Warri Refinery, the Peugeot and Volkswagen car assembly plants were some of the projects envisaged in the 2nd Development Plan. It was a venture emboldened by the massive rise in oil revenue which at 4.6 billion naira in 1975 was 63 times its value in 1969. As oil revenue rose -topping 16 billion naira in 1980- so did the imagination of the development planners. While the 1970-74 plan anticipated capital spending of about 3 billion naira, the 1975-80 plan was 30 billion -later revised to 43 billion- naira, and the 1981-85 4th Plan some 82 billion naira. State-capital venture moved into the multi-billion naira world of steel, petrochemical and petroleum refining.

The effects were two fold. Firstly, the civil/military bureaucracy moved into 'economic management', in the sense of performing what Carchedi calls the 'global functions of capital'(1975:1). A segment of the dominant bloc, mainly from inside the state moved into managerial posts, alongside TNC staff or 'technical partners', to oversee the operations of state-capital. The banking and finance industry -after state acquisition of majority holding- most reflect this. This process was enhanced by the 1975-79 Military regime's tightening up of the capitalist development process. Secondly, the burgeoning state spending programs enhanced the centrality of the civil/military 'ruling' bloc. Securing construction contracts, import licenses, etc, required access to state functionaries or a foothold in 'the corridors of power'. "Influence peddling" not only entered Nigeria's folklore but became a lucrative venture. These processes on the one hand -in a context of intense propagation of acquisitive ethos- reinforced the State as the domain of revenue

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<sup>42</sup> When most of the projects were outlined in 1969, oil revenue was negligent, only 72.5 million naira.



appropriation.<sup>43</sup> This was evident in all the regimes right to the current one, if in varying degrees.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the top echelon of the civil service grew into a very powerful group, a situation dating back to the early years of the Gowon regime. They not only oversee the running of the state, as state-power, but increasingly engaged in performing the functions of capital; most of the government commercial enterprises, and joint-venture projects are under ministerial supervision. Permanent Secretaries combine ministerial duties with board membership, a situation which since 1984 had been extended to the top echelon of the military. A 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' can be said to have come into being.

However the process is not limited to the tenure of the civil/military bureaucrats but extends into retirement. Persons with substantial leverage in the state are much sought after by foreign firms for board room appointment. As Abba et al (1985) discovered, all Federal Permanent Secretaries of the 1970-79 era, save 3 that could not be traced, are board members of various TNCs,<sup>45</sup> the same applies to retired military officers.

In spite of all the claims of the emergent bourgeoisie being subordinate associates of foreign capital, the new corps represent the core of the new indigenous bourgeoisie. Not just bourgeois in aspiration but in the performance of the global functions of capital, often in capital-ownership and most certainly in the appropriation of surplus-value. To see them as 'sordid' handmaids of imperialism is to miss the point. The recent clamour for the privatization of state-capital ventures, i.e. the extension of the frontier of private capitalist ownership, marks a new phase, distinct from the 1970s. While it coincides with the IMF pressures or is even inspired by the IMF demands, one should not be mistaken for the other. Neither is it the case of the indigenous bourgeoisie doing imperialism's dirty

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<sup>43</sup> I will shortly explain the reason for referring to the phenomenon as 'revenue acquisition' and not 'capital accumulation' as it is most commonly called. (e.g. Iyayi 1986)

<sup>44</sup> See Dudley (1982:115-120), Ohiorhenuan(1983:29-36), Forrest (1986), Richard (1983), the government White paper on the Assets Investigation Panel and Newswatch (5/8/85), etc on the issue of corruption.

<sup>45</sup> Take for example the Nigeria Tobacco Company, a subsidiary of British-American Tobacco. When Jerome Udoji, former Head of Service in the East Central State and Head of the Civil Service Review Panel (the Udoji Commission), was appointed Chairman of NTC's board in 1976, the 200 shares that he possessed then were donated to him by NTC/BAT.



job for it. They have served their 'apprenticeship', now they want to be capitalists in the classical sense. As in the earlier period, this is a class created, and advancing its interest, on the back of the state. The state in Nigeria, to put it succinctly, not only has to guarantee the process of accumulation but is also the terrain of class creation. State-Capital remains a significant element of this process.

An element in the promotion of capitalism is the Land Use decree of 1978. The decree removed traditional community-based land ownership rights, mainly in southern Nigeria, and vested them in the State. The personal interest of the Military rulers at the time was no doubt vital to the decree,<sup>46</sup> but it was meant to remove an obstacle to large-scale capitalist farming.

### 3.2.2. State, Economy & Workers' Organizations.

The processes described above also had (and continues to have) major implication for different groups within the society, particularly the subordinate social bloc. I will, in this section, concentrate on workers and their organizations.

1975 to 1978 represents a major watershed for the Nigerian trade union movement. For the new Military regime, trade unions were anathema. Not only had the 1970s seen a rise in worker militancy, -reviving the high points of worker activism of the '40s and mid-'60s,<sup>47</sup> but there was the persistence of a vigorous left-wing within the movement. Politically, the trade union movement remained a threat having contributed a great deal to delegitimizing the Gowon regime. The trade union Left with a history of close association with East Europe, was seen as a 'threat to national security'. These views have persisted within the Ministry of Labour and the 'ruling' factions since the virulent anti-communist days of the 1st Republic. The 1975 Military regime made up its mind, quite early, to intervene in the running of trade unions. Within a month of seizing power, a working committee of academics, civil-servants and 'private sector' representa-

<sup>46</sup> Gen. Obasanjo, the Head of State, for instance left the government in 1979 to set up a multi-million naira farm in Otta, just outside Lagos. Prior to the decree, he experienced considerable resistance from people in Otta, because it would (and did) displace many peasant farmers and dispossess the families who owned the land. After the Land Use decree was promulgated, the land 'stopped' belonging to the community which made its eventual takeover easy.

<sup>47</sup> See Ananaba (1969), Cohen (1970,1974), Waterman (1982,1983) for developments within the union movement.



tives had been set up to advice the regime. In September, a conference on labour and development was organised by the Ministry of Labour in Zaria.

The first public hint that the regime was going to move in on the trade union movement was on 4 December 1975, when the Federal Commissioner for Labour announced a 'New National Labour Policy'<sup>48</sup> to a gathering of trade unionists and employers. Among other things, the regime announced its decision to remove 'ideological and external influences' from the unions, ban affiliations with international bodies beside the ILO and OATUU, restructure unions along industrial lines, provide for compulsory check-off dues for union financing, etc. However, the charge of trade union fragmentation, which was a ground on which the regime was resting its case, was already obsolete with inauguration of the Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC) on 18 December 1975, in spite of police harassment. This is the '2nd NLC', after a similarly named union centre of 1950. The merger was initiated in September 1974 at the burial of a senior trade unionist in Lagos, now called the 'Apena Declaration'. (Umoh & Ayo 1980:1-3). The inauguration of NLC, which was the culmination of this merger process,<sup>49</sup> brought together the 4 labour centres existing at the time.

The regime refused to recognize the Congress and in February 1976 set up a judicial panel (headed by Justice Adebisi) to investigate the operations and financing of the 4 labour centres. In May, the regime appointed an Administrator of Trade Unions (ATU) charged with the task of restructuring the unions along industrial lines and the setting up of a single central labour organisation.<sup>50</sup> The Adebisi Panel<sup>51</sup> served the main purpose of exposing corruption within the movement and the dependence of the union centres on external funding. It 'recommended' a 10-year ban on some senior trade unionists pre-

<sup>48</sup> The outline of the Policy is available in Fashoyin (1980, Appendix B) and Ubeku (1982, Appendix C).

<sup>49</sup> The merger was made cumbersome because the various parties to the merger had to comply with the provisions of the 1973 Trade Union decree.

<sup>50</sup> The vilification campaign against the Congress by the right-wing of the Trade Union movement and some of the middle-rank unionists who felt left out (or not given desired post) in the new (2nd) NLC, was used by the Commissioner for Labour as a justification of the regime's drive against the Unions at his 21 May 1976 press conference. See Umoh & Ayo (1980:26-56) Umoh was himself a keen participant in this campaign.

<sup>51</sup> See Report of the Tribunal (Adebisi Panel 1977) and the Government White Paper.



venting them from engaging in union activities.<sup>52</sup> Almost all were in the 2nd NLC leadership.

The ATU -working with the Ministry of Labour officials and a 3-man panel- between 1976 and February 1978, restructured over 946 unions and employers associations into 42 industrial unions, 15 Senior staff associations, 4 'professional' unions and 9 employers associations (Fashoyin 1980:151-4). A new Nigeria Labour Congress was inaugurated on February 1978, only the 42 worker' unions were affiliated to the NLC at this time. However the regime had to abandon its plan to have the Ministry of Labour appoint the full-time officials of the new unions after intense opposition from the trade unionists. The plan was aimed at turning unions into a proto-state bureaucracies and preventing the leftists from gaining control of the new unions. The latter group gained control of the NLC. In 1978 two decrees giving the unions legal recognition and providing for automatic dues check-off were promulgated. Employer's recognition of the unions was made legally mandatory.

#### **Economy, Trade Unions & Statutory Regulation.**

The restructuring exercise should be put within the wider context of a regime's agenda of capitalist development. Given that this was defined by 'the ideology of "developmentalism"' (Hutchful 1986:160) and peripheral capitalism presented as 'national development', hindrance to capitalist accumulation and hegemony was decried as sectarian. Hence alongside the setting up of 'responsible unions' were decrees overhauling the national grievance machinery and aimed at arresting worker militancy. Between 1976 and 1977 three main statutes (and two amendments) on industrial disputes were enacted: the Trade Disputes Decree and the Trade Disputes (Essential Services) Decree in 1976 and in 1977, the Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Decree and an amendment to each of the 1976 decrees. Of indirect relevance is the 1977 Productivity, Prices and Incomes Board (PPIB) Decree.

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<sup>52</sup> Central to the Panel's work was the Ministry of Labour's Director of Labour, who is now the Director of NECA.



The 1976 Trade Disputes Decree (No.7)<sup>53</sup> in contrast to the 1968 decree<sup>54</sup> which it repealed created a permanent Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) and a National Industrial Court (NIC).<sup>55</sup> It outlined the disputes settlement procedure, from the appointment of a mediator or a conciliator to the NIC level. The appointment of a Mediator is left to the parties in dispute, a stage reached after the internal grievance process has been exhausted. The Conciliator appointed by the Ministry of Labour follows, if the Mediator fails to produce a settlement, the Mediator and Conciliator have 14 and 21 days respectively to settle a dispute. The referral of a case to the IAP commences after the conciliation stage, although the Commissioner could 'apprehend' a dispute at an earlier stage and refer it to the IAP. The NIC has appellate and final jurisdiction on disputes. Although at each of the stages there is a provision for appeal, the Commissioner has power to confirm, reject or refer -for reconsideration- an IAP or NIC ruling, regardless of what the disputants feel. Once the Commissioner confirms the terms of a settlement, it becomes legally binding. All collective agreements become valid only after the Commissioner's approval is granted. These are some of the powers the Commissioner inherits from the supplanted decrees.

The decree like the earlier ones, requires the declaration of a dispute at least 15 days before taking industrial action. Where the previous decrees made strikes (and lock-outs) explicitly illegal, the 1976 decree was more subtle. No industrial action could be embarked upon without first exhausting the grievance procedure, or during a hearing of the dispute. However once the ruling is given it becomes binding; all forms of industrial action are thus illegal. Contempt of the IAP or NIC would, on conviction, attract a fine of 200 naira or 3 months in prison.

The 1976 Trade Disputes (Essential Services) Decree (No.23), declared two months after the other decree, prohibits any form of industrial action that would disrupt estab-

<sup>53</sup> Decrees passed under the Military were adopted by the Civilian legislature and called 'Acts'. To avoid confusion on the origin of the statutes I refer to them as 'Decrees'.

<sup>54</sup> This is the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provision) Decree No.21 of 1968, subsequently amended in Decrees No.2 of 1969 and No.36 of 1973. The arbitration body was then called Industrial Arbitration Tribunal.

<sup>55</sup> IAP has 12 members; a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman and ten other members. Two each are appointed on the recommendation of NLC and NECA. The NIC has 5 members; 1 President and 4 others. All are appointed by the Commissioner.



lishments providing 'essential services'.<sup>56</sup> The Head of the Military government assumed the power to proscribe any union<sup>57</sup> violating the dispute procedure outlined in Decree 7, or contravening Decree 23. The power of indefinite detention, first promulgated in the 1969 amendment, was also reinstated. The Courts as in other previous decrees were barred from inquiring into the decrees.

The 1977 amendment to Decree 7, introduced 4 main elements to the dispute process. First, it strengthens the power of the Commissioner to apprehend disputes, confirm or reject IAP rulings. Second, it increased the penalty for violating the procedure to 6 months jail term, and third, it removed the power of employers, the IAP or NIC to grant wage increases. Finally, for the first time, the principle of 'No Work, No Pay' came on the statute books; employers now have a statutory backing for refusing to pay the striking workers for the duration of their industrial action. Although not applicable in cases of lock-out, it represents a major victory for NECA which had for years campaigned for such a law. The amendment to Decree 23 also increased penalties for contravening the decree to 6 months jail terms for union officials and a fine of 10,000 naira for employers.

The 1977 Petroleum anti-sabotage decree, in line with the mood of the military regime that year, prescribed the death penalty or a 23 year jail term for disrupting or attempting to disrupt the production or distribution of petroleum products. Although it is difficult to say that this has had a dramatic effect on industrial disputes in the oil industry, it remains what a senior union official calls 'the Damocles sword hanging over our heads'. The PPIB decree, part of an anti-inflation program, established the basis for the government to set a percentage ceiling on the wage and monetary benefits that could be granted by an employer, through the annual Income Policy Guidelines.

After the trade union restructuring, NECA set about (re)organizing employers in the various industries. While the Administrator of Trade Unions could organize only 9

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<sup>56</sup> 'Essential services' cover the public sector, electricity, water, fuel, medical services provision, all forms of transportation, air and sea ports, electronic media, communications medium, supplies of materials for the Armed Forces, etc.

<sup>57</sup> A proscribed union would have its property seized by the State and failure to hand over union property would cost the person 5 years jail sentence.



employers' associations,<sup>58</sup> by December 1984 there were 15 such bodies organised under the aegis of NECA. While some of these bodies are fully-fledged federations engaging in industry-wide bargaining, many like the Petroleum and Natural Gas Employers' Association are ad-hoc groups bringing together the employers within an industry. Although of the same status as the NLC as an umbrella body, NECA remains a shadowy, non-statutory body coordinating the interests of the different units of capital on a wide range of issues, and mapping out a collective response to the State or the trade unions. In addition NECA provides training and advisory services for its members in their negotiating stand against the unions.

### **State, Economy and Workers' Organizations in Context.**

The implications of the developments of the 1976-78 period are that while providing nominal cover for union activities, the various statutes have also reinforced the mechanism for the repression of worker activists, ostensibly within the framework of grievance handling. To mention a handful, in October 1977 two Shell-BP unions were proscribed by the regime for going on industrial action; in 1978, the union leaders in the Peugeot plant in Kaduna were jailed for 3 months for 'contempt' of the Arbitration Panel. Violent police reaction to workers' action also did not diminish. In 1978, 1982 and 1985, industrial actions by workers in Volkswagen plant (VON), outside Lagos, on every occasion led to fatalities inflicted by the Police. In the December 1985 incident, it was the Nigerian Chairman of VON<sup>59</sup> that justified the management and police actions to the press.

At a wider level, the relations between the various regimes and the NLC since 1978 has been anything but cordial. In the face of the failure of the right-wing elements to secure control of the NLC, the Military regime responded with the stoppage of the million naira subvention to the Congress promised by the regime before the NLC inauguration in 1978. The Congress' first premises -provided by the regime- were in the words

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<sup>58</sup> In the oil industry for instance the Administrator's effort in 1977 to set up an employers' body, with statutory obligations, was rejected by the TNCs.

<sup>59</sup> This was Professor Ojetunji Aboyade, an economist and major contributor to the capitalist development strategy of the 1970s and in the post-1985 period. Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the country's President between 1979 and 1983, was the Chairman of Peugeot's Board in 1978.



of the Congress' 1st President, 'perforated with listening devices'<sup>60</sup> planted by the state security agency. The NLC campaign on a wide range of social issues and specific worker-issues while reviving the tradition of the workers' organizations speaking on behalf of the other subordinate classes in society, has brought the Congress into collision with the different regimes since 1979.

The campaign which the Congress shelved in 1979 -because of the transition to civil rule- was revived in 1980;<sup>61</sup> this led to the General Strike of 1980 (see Ootobo 1981). The NPN government responded with attempts over the next two years to break the Congress, by promoting a self-styled 'anti-communist' group within the movement. Partly as a result of the resolute fight put up by the Congress, and the warning from the security service of the threat to 'national security' which the existence of multiple labour centres would cause; the regime abandoned the effort whilst still sponsoring the right-wing group.

It was however under the post-1983 Military regimes that the trade union movement was to face the most virulent attacks. The Aircraft Pilots and Engineers union, the medical doctors and Resident Officers unions were, in 1984, the first to feel the wrath of a hostile repressive state. The unions were not only banned, but many of their officials clamped into detention for well over a year. Intermittently, the officials of the radical University teachers' union (ASUU) were thrown into detention. The most dramatic example of state repression against the movement came in 1986. In May, a student demonstration in Zaria was attacked by armed Policemen<sup>62</sup> and over 20 people were killed. The NLC, ASUU and NANS, the student body, responded with a plan for a protest demonstration on 4 June. The 'human right' regime not only had all the leaders of the various bodies arrested on the eve of the demonstration, but also placed the armed forces on full alert. The NLC headquarters in Lagos was placed under police occupation, Naval war ships were stationed off Lagos harbour, Air Force helicopter gunships kept vigil over Lagos. The para-military and the armed forces were ordered to shoot demonstrators on sight (see

<sup>60</sup> University of Ibadan's Industrial Relations program seminar addressed by Hassan Sunmonu, the Congress President, in 1982.

<sup>61</sup> See NLC's The Workers' Charter, 1980.

<sup>62</sup> There had been an earlier demonstration against various aspects of the regime's policies; the IMF policies, retrenchment of workers, pay-cut and the underfunding of education, etc.



Mohammed 1986). In a very precise summing up of the nature of state in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, a trade union official was reported to have said 'the government (was) behaving like an army of occupation'!

A month later, the regime enacted Decree 1763 which made it illegal for 'senior staff' associations to affiliate with the NLC and revoked the automatic dues check-off provision of 1978 for these unions. The decree was to -organizationally- disengage militant senior staff unions like ASUU from NLC, given their assumed radicalizing influence on the latter. Secondly, revoking automatic check-off dues, it is felt, might weaken these unions; first, making their financing more difficult and second, increasing the non-unionized segment of senior staff workers. It should be remembered that the militant senior staff unions, since 1984, have been the main focus of opposition to the regime. .

It is important to emphasize that workers and the trade union movement were not the only victims of the peripheral capitalist state. Students, as evident above, have borne some brunt of state violence, specifically in protests which went beyond simple 'student issues'. In 1978 as in 1986, scores had been shot down by the Police. The massacre of peasant farmers in Bakalori (Sokoto state) in 1981 during the protest against state failure to compensate them or re-settle them following the expropriation of the land for a dam project, remains unparalleled in the use of state violence in the history of post-colonial Nigeria. In a style reminiscent of the US forces in Vietnam, the paramilitary conducted a scorching operation in which scores of villages were destroyed and an unknown number of peasants murdered.

### **3.3. Politics, Economy & Society: some concluding remarks.**

In this concluding section I will dwell on some theoretical issues. These include, first the question of the nature of Nigerian economy; second, the issue of the nature of the state and finally, deriving from this, the nature of politics in Nigeria. This final aspect relates to what I analyse earlier as the disengagement of state and civil-society in Nigeria. These theoretical issues I believe have significant bearing on the rest of the analyses in this study.



The capitalism I highlighted earlier in this chapter, needs putting in perspective. If one understands capitalism not just in terms of generalized commodity relations but as the socio-economic formation of value-in-motion, (the metamorphosis of capital through the full circuit of capital) the nature of the capitalist 'development' being fostered becomes suspect. Projects like the vehicle and electronic assembly plants, which epitomize the 'productive base' of the economy, in the sense of the expanded valorization of capital, are glorified forms of import substitution, with one disadvantage. Most rely on importation for over 80% of their production 'inputs'. The peripheral essence of the 'productive base' was most dramatically demonstrated in 1984, when the Military regime, in an attempt to cope with debt and balance of payment crisis, slammed down on imports. Overnight, the productive base of the economy collapsed. The skewed character of the economy is heightened by the reliance of the 'productive' capitalist enterprises on state derived revenue for their survival. Every dip in oil prices therefore throws the whole economy into a crisis. In essence, what we have is a 'productive base' which is essentially a territorial extension of the international capital's sphere of production. Even state projects like petroleum refining, as is evident in Chapter 5 and 7, are in the same state. In spite of the current effort of the government to force 'internal' sourcing of raw materials, illustrated by the brewery industry (FT 24/2/87 p.xiii), a major shift in the orientation of the economy is hardly visible. In any case, the brewery industry hardly represents what one may call a viable productive base of the economy.

The bulk of economic activities and the most profitable, remains trapped in the sphere of circulation (exchange), which itself inserts the economy into the international capitalist economy as a 'trading outpost'; so that there is not just a disjunction between the sphere of production and the rest of the economy but between the spheres of production and circulation. Turner (1980) has pointed out the aspect of the 'compradorial' behaviour of members of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, but equally it needs pointing out that capitalist development goes beyond board room participation of the indigenous bourgeoisie. The constant crisis that the economy faces, relates as well to the overall nature of its (aspirant) capitalists; what we have had since the 1970s is more a case of revenue appropriation than capital accumulation. The expropriated state revenue, either in form



of appointing petroleum middle men, the so-called 'prebend' politics or over-invoicing for foreign exchange allocation, often means the repatriation of such accumulated revenue to European or US banks -which curiously goes to strengthen the hands of 'metropolitan' Finance Capital. The effect is that although vast amounts of money-capital are expropriated, they never quite make it back into the economy as productive-capital. The dominant ethos of the emergent bourgeoisie remains 'consumerist' (Fanon 1963:120), even the more 'technocratic' segment of it. The 'capital flight' only helps to exacerbate both the contradictions within, and the peripheral character of the economy.<sup>63</sup>

The second issue is the nature of the state in Nigeria. Turner's argument that 'the Nigerian state lacks coherence' in the sense of not being 'dominant over or capable of regulating society' (1981:63), while partly useful in terms of the intra-dominant bloc struggles, is difficult to sustain vis-a-vis the working class, the peasantry and other subordinate classes. Some aspects of this were outlined earlier. It can in fact be argued that the only way we can make sense of the 1966, 1975, 1983 and 1985 coups is that a segment of the dominant bloc -i.e. the Military top echelon, the quintessence of the state- overthrew the governments to guarantee the survival of both the state and the accumulation process, precisely because those replaced could not guarantee them or threatened those conditions. Furthermore, as Beckman (1982) notes, the 'compradorial' character of some fragments of the dominant bloc, does not necessarily suggest that the state is a 'compradorial state' as Turner argued. The 1975 coup, if anything, was an attempt to rescue the state from the compradorial elements and pursue a more coherent capitalist agenda. That it has not turned out to be a great success in the end is neither here nor there.

On the other hand, Dudley (1971, 1982) and Ake (1985b), among others, have pointed to the extent to which state-power becomes personalized by the incumbents in Nigeria. While starting from different positions, both Dudley (1982:70) and Ake (1985b:9) conclude that it is difficult to talk of the existence of the state or even politics in this context. The phenomenon of the 'personalization of the state-power', while peculiar in its forms needs to be put within the context of both the social bloc that control the state

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<sup>63</sup> The idea is owed to John Ohiorhenuan (Economics Dept., Univ. of Ibadan).



and of peripheral capitalism. As I note earlier, that the State has become central to the accumulation (or expropriation) process. The chaos of that process derives partly from the absence of a cohesive authority around which the social bloc can be organised as in the cases of Kenyan or the Ivorian -even the NPC for the 'northern faction' of the Nigerian dominant bloc. Neither the state nor politics cease to exist because of the chaotic process of 'accumulation'; this is obvious in relation of the State or the dominant bloc to the subordinate classes in Nigeria.

Secondly, classes within contemporary Nigeria as in any social formation, must be understood as derivatives of commodity relations within the specific historical and cultural context. To analyse one without the other is to miss the 'differentia specifica', so to speak, in each working class or each bourgeoisie. An emergent capitalist class weaned within the islamic, Hausa/Fulani context of Northern Nigeria, is a class whose specific colour is defined within that historico-cultural situation. To that extent, its appeal to the protection of 'Northern interest', is not necessarily false or dubious. Nonetheless, we have to understand that its definition of 'Northern interest' -or 'Southern interest' as its Southern opposite does- is primarily a class perspective. In other words, the 'northern' interest, culture or religion, is defined in its own (the dominant bloc's) image. Only then can we make sense of a 'Sokoto' President, in conjunction with a 'Sokoto' Governor, ordering the massacre of 'Sokoto' peasants of Bakalori in 1981. Or why the 'Maitasine' uprising in 1981 focused on the crisis of immense personal wealth, on the one hand and mass poverty on the other, in Kano. That the language of the revolt was islamic is because their world is rooted and defined within those terms, it is a case of the 'urban poor' whose definite 'colour' is islamic; the same analysis applies in Southern Nigeria.

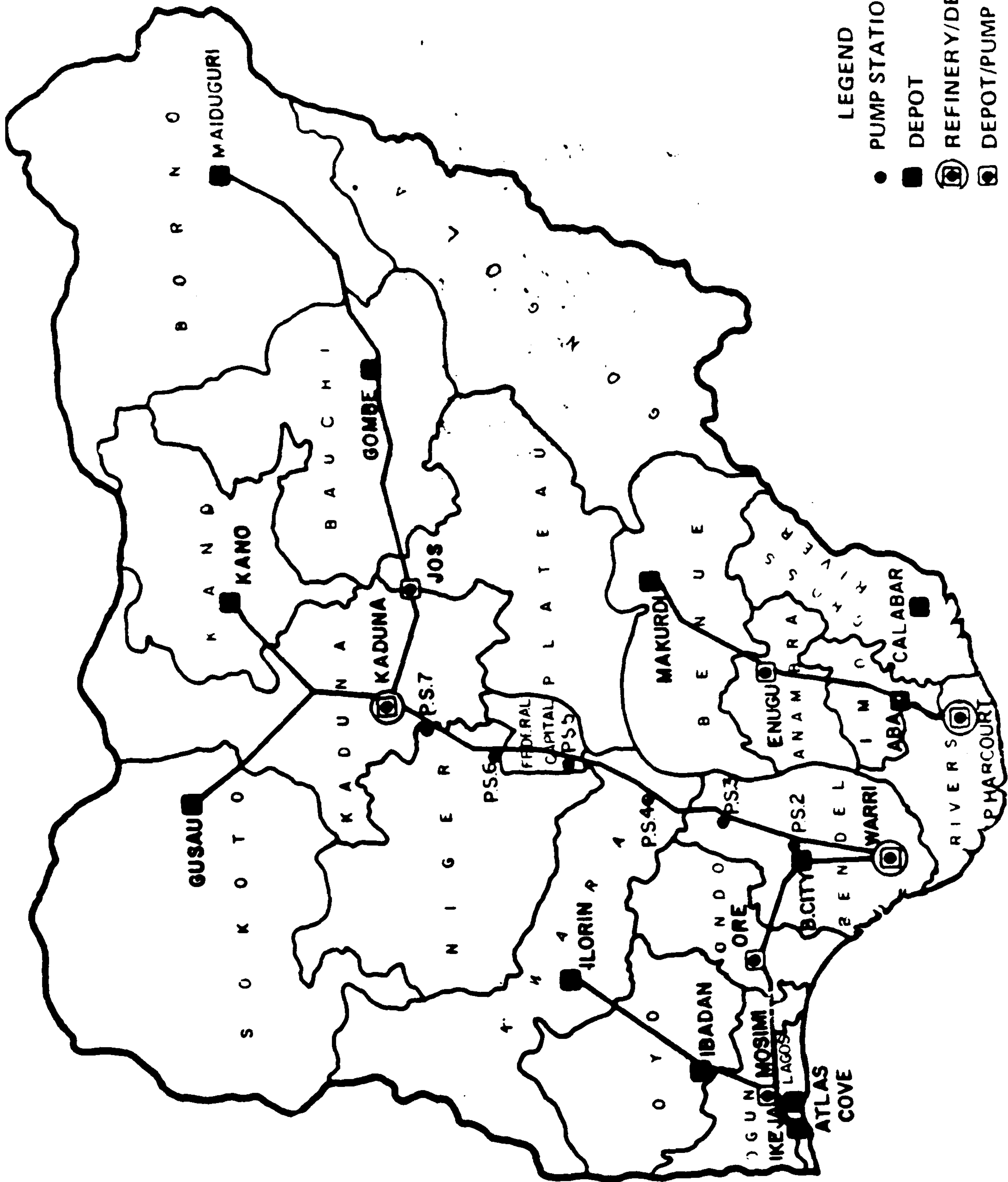
This leads to the question of the nature of state and civil-society -in Gramscian terms- in Nigeria. While my hold on the theorization of the civil-society is still imprecise, a number of comments can be offered. As I noted earlier, the process of dislocation of state and civil-society, for most parts, goes back to the colonial period. The State, in its dual roles as state-power and in the allocation of resources or the direction of socio-economic lives has, however, become central to general social life. The domain of civil-society on the other hand, is usually coincident with specific ethno-cultural collectives.



The language of civil-society is therefore often culturally defined. But it is important to distinguish the content of relations from their forms of expression. The destruction of agricultural and marine activities by incessant pollution in the oil producing areas (Hutchful 1985), for instance is primarily a peasant -class- issue, though its expression may be in national or ethnic terms. Equally the question of uneven development within the country, because it is territorially specific, tends to flow into, and become nationality issues (see Yahaya 1978). Nonetheless, accumulation by members of the dominant bloc is primarily a class process; that someone invokes religion or nationality in the process does not necessarily change the nature of that accumulation. Hence, to assert the absence of 'class politics' (Richard 1983:25) because the dominant political practice does not involve a revolutionary onslaught on Lagos is to define political process in empiricist terms.

To recap, I have outlined the nature of the economy as capitalist, albeit peripheral, with a strong emphasis on state-capital. This, I have argued, is crucial to both the nature of accumulation (or expropriation) and the character of the state. I have also tried to demonstrate the role of the state in mediating the interest of the emergent indigenous bourgeoisie and international capital. While politics and state may be shrouded in 'non-class' arguments, the essence of the state remains principally class, even if mediated by religious or ethnic considerations.

# NNPC Refineries, Products Pipeline network, Depots And Pumpstations



**NIGERIA**  
SCALE: 1 6 000 000

- LEGEND**
- PUMP STATION (P.S.).
  - DEPOT
  - ⊙ REFINERY/DEPOT/PUMP STATION
  - ◻ DEPOT/PUMP STATION



## Chapter 4.

### NNPC: state-capital, ownership and control.

#### Introduction.

In this chapter, I discuss the development of the NNPC as a central unit of state-capital in the oil industry. This is in two main parts, first the development within the industry and Nigerian government, leading to the formation of the corporation in 1977. Second, the operations and management of the corporation and its relation with the rest of the industry. This discussion further explores two issues raised in the last chapter. First, the centrality of state-capital to the economy as well as its operations in the petroleum industry. Second, the nature of the operatives or the functionaries of that capital. The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first, I outline the developments within the industry before 1977, when NNPC was formed. In the second, I examine the developments within NNPC between 1977 and 1986, and the final section looks at what I call 'Managing state-capital', in terms of management and control within the corporation.

#### 4.1. The Nigerian Oil Industry: an overview.

South's<sup>1</sup> survey of the top 400 firms in sub-Saharan Africa puts the turnover of the NNPC at an estimated \$11,000 million, over 18.5 times that of UAC(N) and top of the list. With assets running into billions of naira and employing some 12,000 people, NNPC is a major factor in the oil industry, an industry which is the economic life-line of the country. But this is a long way from 1908 when the first oil exploration in Nigeria took place.

##### 4.1.1. The Oil Industry: 1908-1971.

The Nigerian Bitumen Corporation, a German firm and the firm that first prospected for oil in Nigeria, ceased to operate at the start of the 1914-1918 European war without striking oil. This is no surprise since it was exploring the wrong end of the oil

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<sup>1</sup> South, March 1987, pp.65-80.



basin, i.e the Lagos areas. Two decades later in 1937 Shell D'Arcy, an Anglo-Dutch consortium formed in 1936, started oil exploration in Eastern Nigeria. The TNC was given monopoly concession for the whole country by the colonial state. The search for oil, suspended at the start of the 1939-45 war, resumed in 1946. In 1956, Shell D'Arcy, renamed Shell-BP, struck oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in Rivers State. Two years later, in February 1958, the TNC began exporting crude oil from Nigeria. The production level was about 4,000 barrels per day (bpd).<sup>2</sup> Over the next year, Shell-BP -among other findings- struck oil at Ughelli, near Warri, the first oil field west of River Niger.

In 1959, in anticipation of political independence, two laws on the oil industry were enacted. An amendment to the 1914 Mineral Oil Ordinance standardized the terms of granting exploration and lease concessions to oil TNCs. The Petroleum Profit Tax ordinance on the other hand, fixed the profit tax at 50% of realised proceeds and royalties at between 8% and 12.5% of the value of oil at the point of extraction.<sup>3</sup> In April 1960, 6 months before formal independence, the Ministry of Mines and Power was created.

By 1961, the number of oil TNCs granted concession had increased to six, including Mobil which was granted exploration rights in 1955, this meant that by 1962, Shell-BP had given up 50% of its concessions.<sup>4</sup> In 1962 the Petroleum Unit of the Ministry of Lagos Affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Mines & Power under the title of 'Hydrocarbon Section'. This functioned as the regulatory force over the oil industry. In the same year, the Federal government and Shell-BP started negotiations on building the country's first refinery. The result was the Nigerian Petroleum Refining Company (NPRC) at Port Harcourt, which was commissioned in 1965 with 60% state-ownership; Shell and BP each held 20% of the equity and managed the refinery. Until 1965, Shell-BP was also the only oil

<sup>2</sup> This is Shell's figure (1982:5), the Irikefe Report puts it at 5,000 bpd and NNPC sources at 5,100 bpd. A barrel is about 159 litres or 0.138 metric tons.

<sup>3</sup> Royalties and other duties were included in the State's 50% profit tax. The oil TNCs were also allowed a rate of depreciation far higher than the norm elsewhere. (Turner 1977:24, Shatzl 1969).

<sup>4</sup> This was no problem for Shell-BP. As a Shell document points out 60% of Nigeria's land area 'is covered by ingenious and metamorphic rocks' with no prospect for oil (SDPC 1981:3). The TNC retained the high yield/low cost areas of the Delta.



producer in Nigeria. Three firms subsequently began production, i.e., Gulf in 1965, Agip and Safrap (ELF) in 1966.

In 1968, the events that were to completely alter the character of Nigeria's oil industry, started with a report sent to the Ministry of Finance by a Nigerian employee of BP, W.O. Uwamu.<sup>5</sup> Previously employed at NPRC, he was transferred to BP's Marketing Division in Lagos at the start of the civil war, Uwamu exposed the oil TNCs practices of tax avoidance through 'bookkeeping losses' (Turner 1977:29f). The report coincided with an on-going struggle between the Ministries of Finance and Mines and Power on the relation between the oil TNCs and the government. Two years earlier, and on Shell-BP's initiative, some aspects of taxing the oil TNCs had been changed. The 1967 amendments to the Petroleum Profit Tax and Income Tax laws -effective from 1966- established the use of 'posted prices' as the basis of taxation. Operating cost was also set as the basis for calculating royalty, the rate of capital allowance was also reduced, Shell-BP's offer was a pre-emptive move. Earlier in 1966, Libya had extracted a more favourable deal from Shell than Nigeria did. Under the Shell-BP/Nigeria agreement, the government could demand that the agreement be brought into line with a more favourable one made elsewhere on the continent by Shell or BP.<sup>6</sup>

The Ministry of Finance however, recognized the (greater) potentials for oil-based revenue and was arguing for a more active indigenous involvement in the industry, and the need for specialized knowledge that dealing with the oil industry or oil TNCs requires. A Petroleum section responsible for tax and royalty assessment was set up in the Ministry, this was against a more complacent stance of the Mines and Power ministry. The Uwamu Document confirmed the Ministry of Finance's suspicion about the oil TNCs, and in late 1968 tabled a memorandum at the Federal Executive Council; the paper called for a thorough review of the State's position on the industry and a panel was subsequently set up to look into the issue. The panel's Report,<sup>7</sup> marked a watershed in developments in the industry.

<sup>5</sup> I owe the account of the events between 1968 and 1975 to Terisa Turner (1977). Hers is, I believe, the only comprehensive study of the period.

<sup>6</sup> Since Shell-BP had been producing for over 10 years it was not affected by the cut in capital allowance for instance.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice, 1969, Report of the Fact-Finding Mission...



The Report highlighted the fragmentary nature of the State's relations with the oil TNCs and the latter's manipulation of these agencies; the sparsity of indigenous technical personnel in oil related areas; etc. The Report recommended the setting up of the machinery for policy formulation on the industry; tighter control on revenue collection; active state involvement in the industry; the setting up of an oil ministry; OPEC membership and state sponsorship of the training of indigenous personnel.

The Report led to the enactment of the Petroleum Decree No.51 of 1969 and the setting up of the Petroleum Advisory Board (PAB) as the government's policy formulation body. The Petroleum division of the Ministry of Mines and Power was upgraded to a Department, with a Director of Petroleum Resources as head, a post just below that of Permanent Secretary. Two years later the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) was created and Nigeria became the 11th member of OPEC in July of 1971.

The 1969 Petroleum Decree among other things vested all rights and control of petroleum within the Nigerian territory in the state. The significance of this is that subsequent concessions would be granted to a TNC only with state equity participation. The 2nd Development Plan for instance, set as an objective the indigenous control of the industry. The decree also demanded that the oil TNCs be incorporated in Nigeria, reduced the duration of exploration licenses and mining leases, introduced licenses for all the up-stream and down-stream<sup>8</sup> aspects of the industry and made the training of indigenous personnel a condition of granting oil lease and license to a TNC. (Turner 1977:50).

#### 4.1.2. The Petroleum Industry: 1971-1977.

The state's oil policy in the 1970s involved a shift from a purely regulatory role to one of participation and direct commodity production. This involved a two-track approach, viz., equity participation in the existing TNCs and the setting up of a state agency for direct production activities. The NNOC from the 1971 Decree 18,<sup>9</sup> would be involved in both the up-stream and down-stream aspects of the petroleum industry. It was to have a General Manager as its Head and the Ministry of Mines & Power (M&P) as its

<sup>8</sup> 'Up-stream' refers to the exploration, drilling or mining sides of oil industry operations, and 'down-stream' to the refining, distribution and sale of petroleum products.

<sup>9</sup> Nigerian National Oil Corporation Decree 1977, Decree 18 (22 April 1971).



supervising Ministry. M&P retained the Petroleum Resources department, the regulatory arm, and the Ministry's Permanent Secretary became the chairman of NNOC's Board of Directors.<sup>10</sup>

NNOC from the beginning saw itself as a high-tech specialist organization, modeling itself, organizationally on the oil TNCs. By the end of 1974, NNOC had 4 specialist divisions; i.e. the Exploration and Production, Engineering Technical Services, Marketing, and Gas & Petrochemicals.<sup>11</sup> NNOC had 3 other divisions responsible for Legal; Finance and Administration matters. As Turner (1977) notes, it established the tradition, inherited by the NNPC, of attracting young highly educated Nigerians. Many of them in 1975, had left better paid jobs in the TNC sector of the oil industry to join NNOC (Turner 1977:61).

Between 1971 and 1973 NNOC was involved mainly in recruiting and training of its personnel. Within this period the corporation was run by the Petroleum section of M&P. However from the mid-1970s, NNOC's activities shifted to exploration with the seismic surveys starting in 1974. These surveys, undertaken with Soviet technical assistance,<sup>12</sup> covered over 12,000 kilometers of off-shore areas; on-shore seismic surveys started in 1975 and exploration drilling for oil and gas began in 1976 (NNPC 1982:7). However, NNOC's efforts to engage in upstream and down-stream production or distribution, met with opposition from M&P which I will explain in a moment.

The other plank of state oil industry policy was the acquisition of what is often called 'undivided interest' in the TNCs. This theoretically means not just equity ownership but involvement in the direction and allocation of capital. In April 1971, 35% 'undivided interest' was acquired in all the oil TNCs operating in Nigeria<sup>13</sup> and in 1974, the acquired interest was increased to 55% (NNPC 1982:5). At the same time, the state acquired between 36% and 40% interest in the oil service companies operating in Nigeria. These ac-

<sup>10</sup> Other Board members were the PSs of Finance, Economic Development, the Head of Mines & Power's Petroleum Resources unit, the GM of NNOC and three other persons.

<sup>11</sup> The Second Refinery Project team, supervising the construction of the Warri Refinery, was transferred to the M&P earlier in the year.

<sup>12</sup> The active support that Nigeria's 'natural western allies' gave to the Biafran attempted secession between 1967 and 1970 marked a turning point in Nigerian-Soviet relations. Soviet assistance was received on a number of projects and personnel training. The Soviet seismic party is an example.

<sup>13</sup> 51% of Deminex, Occidental and Japan Oil was acquired (Turner 1977:138)



quisition were mainly in response to OPEC guidelines. The acquisitions were made at an estimated cost of over 409 million and 3.5 million naira for the producing and service companies respectively, and paid for in oil that accrued to the state in proportion to its interest. (NNPC 1982:5-6, Amu 1982)

Also in response to OPEC guidelines, profit tax increased to 60.78% in October 1974, 65.75% at the end of the year and 85% by April 1975.<sup>14</sup> Compared with many OPEC members, Nigeria's oil policies pale into insignificance. By 1971 for instance, Sonatrach, the Algerian state oil concern, controlled 77% of the country's oil production and 100% of gas. Libya, by 1973, held an 85% interest in its oil industry and the Libyan state oil agency was responsible for 61% of total production of oil (Turner 1977:140-2). The case of Indonesia pioneering production sharing -with 100% state equity ownership- which inspired a similar deal in Nigeria with Ashland Oil Company in 1973 (Amu 1982:9) did not, as Turner notes, give the state's agency even supervisory control over such companies(1977:149f). What emerged, as will become clearer with NNPC, was a case of the State footing the production bill -proportional to its equity- without any real control over the allocation and direction of capital. The crisis that developed between the NNOC and the Ministry centred around these issues.

While the NNOC sought an aggressive pricing policy, direct engagement in production and taking 100% control of the TNCs, in line with the more radical members of OPEC, the Ministry rejected all these in favour of the status-quo, i.e. deferring to and leaving the TNCs in charge of the industry. In 1971 the Ministry's conservative role was evident in the participation agreements signed with Shell-BP. It was agreed to keep oil prices frozen at the April 1971 level (\$3.25 p/b) until the end of 1975, and allowed 90 days credit for buyers of Nigeria's oil against the prevalent practice of 30 days. Although under OPEC and NNOC pressure, the agreement was revoked, the credit policy continued until 1975.<sup>15</sup> The failure of the Ministry in late 1973 to endorse a \$22 p/b sale deal reached by the Marketing division of NNOC, meant the oil was still unsold when prices

<sup>14</sup> Petroleum Profits Tax (Amendment) Decree 1977, (No.55), of 28 July, (S.1). The new TNCs are allowed to pay 65.75% profit tax until 'their production cost are fully amortized'(S.2)

<sup>15</sup> As Turner points out a month's credit was worth 5 to 10 cents p/b in 1975.



dropped to \$14 p/b within days. In addition, the Ministry's response to the 1975 oil glut, of cutting prices and not production, led to a 36% drop in the value of exports (Turner 1977:101) and balance of payment crisis for the government. By early 1975, with the boom in oil prices, it was estimated that the Ministry's policies cost Nigeria between \$82 and \$111 million. (Turner 1977)

NNOC's urge to be involved in direct production was also rejected by the Ministry. Projects like the building of the 2nd refinery (Warri) or the pipeline construction were taken out of NNOC's control. As in the case of Warri Refinery, it meant that those undertaking the negotiations for these projects were civil servants with neither the requisite knowledge of the oil industry nor the stomach for autonomous, indigenous productive activities. Central to the rows was the claim that the Ministry was usurping both the functions of the NNOC and its control:<sup>16</sup> while Decree 18 provided for the appointment of a GM for NNOC, none was appointed. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry was therefore both Board chairman and de-facto GM. The Board, as Turner points, out was composed of 5 persons from the Ministry and none from the NNOC. It meant that, although set up to prospect for, produce, sell and refine petroleum (products), the autonomy the NNOC needed to initiate policies and argue its position was absent. For the NNOC personnel, the Ministry's positions were not only damaging to the 'national interest' but that the Ministry was not technically competent to make the policies.

The crisis boiled over with the Udoji Commission,<sup>17</sup> which rejected the demand for better remuneration for specialist personnel in the public sector. The response of the NNOC senior managers was to send a memorandum to FEC members in February 1975, in which the pay and conditions issue was made part of the wider issue of the role of the corporation. The document demanded a clarification of NNOC's position vis-a-vis the Ministry; the appointment of a GM for NNOC, and the removal of the Permanent Secretary as Chairman of NNOC.<sup>18</sup> Although the FEC set up a group to investigate the issues, and in July created a separate Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, the crisis revealed

<sup>16</sup> The Ministry's Permanent Secretary (P.C Asiodu), rather than an amorphous 'ministry', was at the centre of these policies and rows.

<sup>17</sup> The Public Service Review Commission, headed by Jerome Udoji, (vide Ch.3).

<sup>18</sup> See Turner (1977:Ch.5), Asiodu (1977) for these developments and Akinsanya (1974) for a background assessment. Both cited in (Turner 1977).



to the new members of Gowon's cabinet a number of things.<sup>19</sup> This include the excessive power of the Permanent Secretaries, the inability of the Head of State to bring them under control and the general morass in which the regime seemed permanently stuck.

With the new regime's suspicion of top civil servants<sup>20</sup> and commitment to a more coherent capitalist growth, the positive atmosphere for the formation of NNPC emerged. In May 1976, the Ministry of Petroleum Resources submitted a memorandum to the FEC in which it made the case for the merger of the Ministry and NNOC (Irikefe 1980:15). The new organization would combine the Ministry's regulatory functions with commercial activities. It was a year before the decree setting up the NNPC was promulgated. Opposition from other Ministries to a body of such immense size and potential power had to be assuaged and the oil TNCs reassured.

#### 4.2. The NNPC: state-capital and control.

Decree No.33<sup>21</sup> which established the NNPC, envisaged a self-financing, commercial and legal entity involved in every aspect of the oil industry as well as managing the acquired interest in the oil TNCs (S.4). The decree however makes a distinction between the commercial and regulatory activities of the corporation. While most of the operational units of NNPC are under the control of the Managing Director, the Inspectorate Division, which is the regulatory arm, is under the Commissioner (now Minister) for Petroleum Resources who is also chairman of NNPC's Board of Directors. Other members of the Board are the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Finance and Economic Development, the Managing Director and any other three persons appointed by the Federal Executive Council and with fixed tenure. The FEC determines the pay of the Managing Director and the immediate subordinates, while the 'Corporation' determines employees' pay.<sup>22</sup> The Board on the other hand determines the conditions of service, and is also responsible for policy making. Expenditure in excess of 5 million naira is subject to

<sup>19</sup> Murtala Mohammed and Obasanjo were two such persons. See Chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> The label 'Super Permanent Secretaries', was given to a group of senior civil servants like Philip Asiodu (the Mines & Power PS from 1971-1975) who exercised immense political power under the Gowon regime.

<sup>21</sup> The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Decree 1977, (Decree No.33) of 21 April 1977.

<sup>22</sup> The non-precise definition of the 'Corporation', as the Irikefe Report notes, later created ambiguity about who has jurisdiction over what.



FEC approval, to whom an annual audited report has to be submitted. The decree made NNPC an area of essential service, which for labour relations purposes, makes all forms of industrial action illegal under the Trade Disputes (Essential Services) decree of 1976.

#### 4.2.1. The NNPC: 1977-1986.

The formation of the NNPC was around the period of both intense internal and external developments in the oil industry. The construction work of the Warri Refinery, envisaged under the 2nd National Plan, started in 1976 and the refinery began producing two years later in September 1978. The construction of the Kaduna Refinery also started in 1977. The 503 million naira complex,<sup>23</sup> with a technical capacity of 100,000bpd, began producing in August 1980. The plant, built by a Japanese firm, is described as 'one of the biggest in Africa'(NNPC 1982:3) and it produces asphalt, lubricating oil, petrol, kerosene, etc. The plant also generates its own power and water supplies, has its own accommodation complex -all common features of NNPC projects.

At about the same period, the pipeline project, initiated after the shortages of petroleum products in 1974/75, was under construction. In 1981 a 3,000-kilometer network of pipelines, linking 21 storage facilities in 17 towns, was completed at an 'initial cost' of over 500 million naira (NNPC 1982a:3).<sup>24</sup> These are projects the NNPC inherited from the Ministry of Mines & Power or Petroleum Resources. The image of NNPC as a major state-capital concern grew in the 1980s with the development of its petro-chemical operations. Two such plants in Warri and Kaduna, costing over 600 million naira were completed in 1986, and still much bigger projects are planned for the 1990s. The Port Harcourt petro-chemical plant, expected to employ about 10,000 workers and have its own township with a projected population of 30,000, is scheduled for completion in 1990 at a cost of over \$2 billion.<sup>25</sup> The 4th Refinery and the liquefied natural gas complex at Port Harcourt are also scheduled for completion in the 1990s at the cost of 600 million naira and \$5 to \$6 billion, respectively. The corporation has also expanded on the initial developments within NNOC in the area of exploration and production with commercial

<sup>23</sup> NAPETCOR, Oct-Dec. 1980, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> See Map. Other lines, e.g Sapele-Ajaokuta line costing over 53.5 million naira (Obianyor 1984:6), have since been built.

<sup>25</sup> Africa Now, Sept. 1984, pp.65-66 and NNPC News, May 1985, p.4.



production of crude oil. In other words, what we have is a rapidly expanding state-capital concern involved in commodity production. It has its own research establishment and geophysical data-processing<sup>26</sup> centre, and NNPC continues to project a corporate image as a smart, efficient organization, pioneering the technology of the future that is crucial for 'national' development efforts. (See Chapter 7).

Other components of the State oil policy at the end of the 1970s also expanded NNPC's operations. The 1977 Indigenization decree brought a number of the petroleum products marketing firms under NNPC control with the acquisition of either 100% ownership or majority interests. These are now generally treated as subsidiaries of the corporation. In August 1979, the government's interest in the oil TNCs was raised to 60% and a month later the BP arm of Shell-BP was nationalized<sup>27</sup> raising state participation to 80%. In February 1985, the NPRC was also taken over by NNPC.

If the NNPC was a product of political controversy, it would also be constantly involved in controversy or the vagaries of political power. In late 1979, a newspaper alleging that 2.8 billion naira in oil proceeds was missing started a political storm which by early 1980 had protest demonstrations on the streets of Lagos. A Tribunal of Inquiry - headed by Justice Ayo Irikefe- was set up to investigate the allegations. Although some of the findings of the panel which are relevant to the operations of state-capital will be discussed later, it is the effect of the controversy on NNPC that is of immediate relevance. In the run-up to appointing the Irikefe Panel, the Board, the Managing Director (MD) and many senior management staff were suspended. Between April 1980 and July 1981, the corporation was run by an Acting MD and without a Board. As evident in Chapter 10, it meant that on most policy issues the corporation came under the direct control of the civil-service and the Office of the President. To an extent, this was not unusual, since 1978 the Heads of State have annexed the ministerial portfolio for Petroleum and

<sup>26</sup> . The Research & Development Dept. is in Port Harcourt and the Geophysical Data Processing Centre is in Oko, near Benin.

<sup>27</sup> This was in response to the British government's intransigence over Zimbabwe's independence. The NPN regime would later -in 1981- pay 71 million naira in compensation to BP. (NNPC News, March 1981, p.1) The TNC is now called Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)



the de facto role of Chairman. The de jure Board Chairmen at the period were both part-time and nominal. During civil rule, the President was assisted by a Special Advisor.

In August 1981, a new MD and Board were sworn-in. The appointments reflect the nature of patronage and balancing act that epitomize the 2nd Republic. The new MD and the Special Advisor had worked together in NEPA,<sup>28</sup> and the Board membership also reflects the controlled distribution of the sources of revenue appropriation among the NPN branch of the dominant bloc.<sup>29</sup> The appointment of party members as crude oil vendors, was a crucial method of revenue appropriation at the time.

The coup of December 1983 led to changes in the top management of the corporation. The Board was dissolved and the MD detained on charges of misdeeds during the 2nd Republic. The new Head of State, who was the Commissioner for Petroleum between 1975 and 1978 and NNPC's first Chairman, re-appointed the first MD. The latter was not reinstated after the Irikefe Panel submitted its report but a professor of Virology was appointed the Minister for Petroleum Resources and (full-time) chairman of NNPC; the first of such appointment in six years. The new Board inaugurated in July 1984, reflects the regime's reliance on academics or retired civil servants. For the first time the corporation's top management had a Minister/Chairman whose energetic execution of his post curtailed their freedom to run the corporation without direct supervision. However, the palace-coup of August 1985, also led to major changes in the corporation's management staff. First, in October 1985 the Managing Director and a number of senior managers were removed from office. The re-organization being undertaken in the corporation was given as the reason, but in early 1986, the Minister was himself eased out of the cabinet. The implications of the rapid turn-over in the top echelon of the corporation are many, as evident in the following chapters. The general effect however is what an NNPC Personnel Officer describes as the erratic policy changes;

...we have a shiftless management; someone does one thing, he leaves. Another one comes and it's a completely different thing.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Amu, the new MD was a Deputy to Yahaya Dikko, the Advisor, when the latter was the General Manager of the National Electric Power Authority.  
<sup>29</sup> Leaving aside the ex-officio members, only one of the remaining four members, the Chairman inclusive, had any previous experience of the oil industry.



### 4.3. Managing State-Capital.

The discussion in this section is in two main parts. The first part briefly examines the role of NNPC as the body that oversees the State's 'undivided interest' in the oil TNCs. This is crucial in two aspects. First, the under-current of this study is about the nature of Nigeria's economy and its implications for relations within NNPC. Second is the issue of an indigenous bourgeoisie developing on the back of the state, raised in last chapter. This is again demonstrated with respect to the oil industry. The major part of the discussion is on the organization and nature of management within the corporation; this forms a direct background to the following chapters.

#### 4.3.1. State-Capital, Transnationals & Control.

The expansion in state equity holding in the oil industry created two forms of interaction between the NNPC and the firms. The equity holding in the oil TNCs is managed under the Joint Ventures program.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the down-stream marketing firms in which NNPC has majority holdings -sometime 100%- are treated as subsidiaries of NNPC. The main difference is that whereas NNPC takes managerial control of the subsidiaries; i.e. appoints their senior managers and controls their budgets, the picture is different with the oil TNCs. The control over managerial policies and the direction of capital suggested by 'undivided interest' is quite different from the reality. While NNPC's contribution to the budgets of these firms is in proportion to the equity holding - 80% in the case of Shell- management control is solidly in the hands of the TNCs. Shell in Nigeria remains firmly a subsidiary of Shell International. The latter appoints the Managing Director as well as key executives and the managerial staff interaction is within the organizational framework of Shell International not NNPC. However as part of the relations, NNPC appoints its personnel as Joint Ventures officers on attachment to the TNCs. In the case of the subsidiaries, e.g. NPRC, UniPetrol, etc., NNPC often appoints their Chief Executives or Board Chairmen from within the corporation.

The implications can be set out in two parts. One is the nature of economic control and revenue appropriation, and the other is the nature of the emergent bourgeoisie in

<sup>30</sup> Under the 4th Development Plan (1980-85) joint venture accounts for 52.01% (3 billion naira) of all NNPC 'Capital Projects' (5.76 billion naira)



Nigeria. Both the state and the NNPC seemed to have struck a relation with the oil TNCs. The equity ownership is apparently taken as indicative of control over the TNCs, so that the latter are left to pursue their exploration and production activities and NNPC's division responsible for explorations and mining of oil goes after the un-allocated lease blocks in the country. As at 1985 for instance, the crude oil production in Nigeria is still under the total control of the TNCs with Shell alone accounting for over 50%.<sup>31</sup> The implications are that while the State, through NNPC, foots the bill, it does not necessarily exercise any powers over the TNCs. Control over production output for instance remains, if anything, nominal. The Irikefe Report points out the absence of any control over the TNCs both in respect of joint ventures operations (p.26) and the regulatory functions of the corporation (p.23). Every depression in the oil market for instance exposes the weakness of the state/NNPC policy on the industry. In 1978, the TNCs secured an agreement by which all exploration costs are incurred by the state and to date, compensations in respect of environmental pollution are paid from the state's share of the operating revenue. The Incentive Agreement signed in 1986<sup>32</sup> between NNPC and the TNCs, not only guaranteed the latter a profit margin of \$2 pb regardless of the price situation, but reverts the calculation of profit tax and royalties to the pre-1967 era; using realised prices instead of posted prices.

At the level of the individual members of the dominant bloc and those in NNPC who oversee the relation between NNPC and the oil TNCs, the relation remains a profitable arrangement. I earlier noted the practice of appointing Nigerians as vendors or middle persons for the sale of crude oil -particularly between 1979 and 1983- as a major mode of revenue appropriation. In spite of the claim in the Irikefe Report that no evidence of misdeeds could be found against anyone within the corporation (p.7 para.3), a Military Tribunal in 1984 and 1985 sentenced a number of middle management personnel of the corporation to jail terms of over 20 years each for corrupt practices. In one case, \$5 million was paid (in kick-backs) to some NNPC officials by Philip Oil, who allowed the latter to lift more oil than was officially allocated to it. The other more prevalent (and legal)

<sup>31</sup> Monthly Petroleum Information ERID: NNPC

<sup>32</sup> Financial Times, 3 March, 1986, p.vii.



dimension of lucrative nature of state-TNCs relations for individuals, is the case of officials sent on supervisory duties to the TNCs under the Joint Ventures agreement. They frequently 'defect' to those firms on a higher salary than they earned at NNPC. The value of such persons to the TNCs is their knowledge of the corporation and personal contacts within it. It got so bad that in 1985 the NNPC management had to pass a bye-law forbidding officers on joint ventures posting, from being employed by any other oil firm within nine months of their resignation from NNPC.

More significantly, the appointment of middle-management personnel as chief executives or Chairmen of the subsidiary is an element in the process of creation and training of the emergent bourgeoisie which I discussed in Chapter 3. Within the corporation as well, the managerial commitment of these 'technocrats' -to use Turner's label (1976, 1980)- is basically one of capitalist 'efficiency'. The criterion of valorization remains predominant among this group of middle and top-level managerial personnel. Within the TNCs on the other hand, NNPC's equity holding, affords protection for both foreign capital, -by obscuring its 'foreignness'- and Nigerians in middle/top-level management positions -by guaranteeing them job security. These Nigerians can only be dismissed from their posts with NNPC's approval. In addition, NNPC guarantees their promotion by ensuring that no expatriate fills a position for which there are 'qualified' indigenes within the TNC. These protection and guarantee do not of course apply to the ordinary worker in the TNCs.

In summary, the corporation's management of state-capital extends on the one hand, the boundary of revenue expropriation. On the other hand -even among those averse to revenue expropriation- a process of creation of, and the protection of units of the indigenous bourgeoisie, are in progress; both are conducted on the back of the state. However, as will be evident in the later chapters, NNPC's equity holdings in the TNCs and the corporation's central role in oil revenue, enter the idioms of the shopfloor and become weapons of workers' struggles.



#### 4.3.2. Managing the Corporation.

In this section, I outline the internal, corporate-level organization of the NNPC. This involves focusing on the structure of the corporation, some elements of the managerial decision making process, and on the framework of labour relations at the corporate-level. This is followed by a similar discussion of the Warri Refinery.

##### 4.3.2.(a) The Corporate-Level Management.

The corporation between 1977 and December 1985 was organised into 12 main divisions, each under a General Manager (GM) and 5 other departments. The latter were under the direct control of the MD or the Minister, when there was one. One of the main divisions, the Petroleum Inspectorate Division, is (as I note above) under the Minister. The Inspectorate as the regulatory arm is in charge of ensuring compliance to statutory regulations on the oil industry; it monitors production level in the oil fields and looks after conservation issues.

The Exploration and Exploitation Division (E&E) is in charge of oil exploration drilling and production activities of the NNPC and also handles the joint ventures operations with the TNCs. The Petrochemical Division (PCD) created in the early 1980s is responsible for running the new -and future- petrochemical plants and related operations of the NNPC. The Projects and Engineering Division (PED) coordinates all the engineering and construction activities of the corporation. However, its main activities to date has been the provision of technical expertise to the management in negotiating construction contracts and the supervision of construction works of the contractors. It is in addition responsible for coordinating corporate-wide oversees training of NNPC's technical personnel, especially with respect attaching them to oil processing establishments outside Nigeria. The Pipelines and Products Marketing Division (PPMD) is in charge of the pipeline network, the depots and petroleum products distribution points throughout the country as well as their maintenance. It also issues permits to independent marketers of petroleum products. The Commercial Division collects NNPC quota crude oil and gas from the TNCs and arranges for their sale and distribution. The Division also handles corporate insurance activities. The Marine Transportation Division on the other hand is re-



sponsible for the transportation of oil and gas to foreign buyers. It hires or purchases tankers for that purpose and is responsible for training their Nigerian operatives.

The two main administrative divisions are the Finance and Accounts Division (FAD), and the Personnel and Services Division (PSD). The FAD acts as the corporate treasury office and controls the budgetary and accounting activities of the corporation. It is responsible for all -foreign and local- banking activities of NNPC, making all payments and receiving proceeds from customers. It takes charge of joint venture accounts and projects financing. The PSD on the other hand is in charge of all Personnel and Administrative matters; in addition, it oversees the Research and Development, and the Computer Services departments. The Personnel arm of PSD is in charge of recruitment and staff records; welfare and benefits; industrial relations; manpower planning and development; and medical services. The Administration arm is in charge of estate property acquisition and maintenance, security services, transport facilities and a general services unit which handles supply of office and residential furniture items and their storage.

The Legal Division handles all corporate legal issues and provides legal services to the various arms of NNPC. Warri and Kaduna Refineries are treated as two separate divisions. In addition to these divisions are five other departments under the control of the MD or Minister. The Internal Audit; the Economic Research and Intelligence department (ERID), which monitors international oil market and monetary developments with an eye on their implications for NNPC operations, are under the Managing Director. So also is the Corporate Planning department which is responsible for budgetary and long-term corporate planning. The Public Affairs department and the Secretary to the Corporation's department were brought under the Minister/Chairman early in 1984.

Another layer of the organizational structure concerns the geographical spread of NNPC's operations around the country. The country is divided into 4 Zones, viz., the Lagos, Warri, Port-Harcourt and Northern zones. The Lagos zone covers the units in the states west of Bendel and south of River Niger. (See Map B). The Warri zone embraces units in Bendel state and Ore, while Port-Harcourt zone includes all units east of River Niger and south of River Benue, Makurdi inclusive. The Northern zone covers all op-



erational units north of Rivers Niger and Benue. A Branch Office in each of Warri, Port Harcourt and Northern zones coordinates all administrative and fiscal matters of all the NNPC units in a zone, excluding the refineries. A Branch Office is headed by a Manager.

Each of the main divisions, is headed by a GM, who is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the division mainly in the area of policy execution. The GMs report directly to the MD. The departments within each division have Managers as their heads, and in cases where departments are further divided into Units, these are usually under the control of a Deputy Manager or a Chief Officer. This however depends on whether or not persons holding such positions are available. The line of command stretches back to the MD. Although in reality each GM is to a degree in charge of his fiefdom, policy issues are determined at the very top. The refineries on the other hand are given some degree of autonomy in staff recruitment and promotion to salary grade level 10, and on operational aspects of the refineries.

Statutorily, the Board of Directors is responsible for broad policy formulation. The ambiguity in the statute on the distinction made between 'Corporation' and 'Board', as noted in the Irikefe Report, creates problem of Board's jurisdiction vis-a-vis the Management. Nonetheless, given that the management is responsible for running the corporation the Board is mostly involved in deciding on issues -under its jurisdiction- only when such issues are presented to it. Of relevance here is the determination of changes in pay and conditions of service, which the Board has to ratify. The presence of two Permanent Secretaries on the Board, in addition to general public service policy coordination, ensures that the civil-service can monitor pay rises in NNPC. This is discussed further in Chapter 10.

The main policy making venue is the Management meeting, held on the first Thursday of every month, this brings together all the GMs and Managers, under the chairmanship of the MD. Memoranda on the subjects of discussion are usually circulated before the meeting and decisions are usually made at the meetings. That, at least, is what is supposed to happen and often what will be presented to the Board for ratification is decided at these monthly meetings.



In December 1985, NNPC adopted a new corporate structure. This restructuring grouped the various units along operational lines. (See Appendix B) This allows the 'Sectors', as they are called, to operate like semi-autonomous parts of a holding company without any loss of coordination at the corporate level; 5 Sectors were therefore created. The Oil and Gas Sector covers the duties of the old E & E, while all the refineries are now under a single sector. This include the NPRC which was taken over by NNPC in February 1985, and the 4th refinery at Port-Harcourt. The Petroleum Product Marketing Sector handles the duties of the old PPDM and the Marine Transportation divisions. The Petrochemicals Sector is the same as the old division and a new Administrative and Finance Sector combines the duties of the old PSD and FAD. Each sector is headed by a Sector Coordinator, a position which has always existed on NNPC's career and pay structure but only filled after the re-organization.

The old Legal division is now the 'Legal Division and Corporate Secretariat'. The old PED is now 'Engineering and Technical Services Division'. These along with the 'Economic and Corporate Planning' division, Internal Audit, the Branch Offices and the subsidiary firms are under the control of the Managing Director. Under the Minister/Chairman are the Inspectorate, the Public Affairs, and the Crude Oil Sales departments. A central element of the sectoral, structure the breaking down of the pattern of direct control from the headquarters in Lagos, so that for administrative purposes, the Warri refinery would for instance relate to the Refinery sector office in Kaduna rather than Lagos. This is particularly salient in industrial relations terms, where previously all major policy decisions were made in Lagos, now the refinery sector is the source. However a likely effect is the fragmentation of union activities along sectoral lines. This could result from variation in grievances from one sector to the next. In addition, once the sectors become the principal basis of interaction among union lay officials, it could lead to sector-oriented union activities. These are however issues that are outside the purview of this study. Given that the greater part of the field-work was done before December 1985, reference throughout this study is to the corporate structure prior to that date.



### Managing Production Politics.

The unionization of the junior workers in 1980 -discussed in full in Chapter 9- prompted a reorganization of the handling of production politics in NNPC.<sup>33</sup> In January 1980, a separate Industrial Relations Unit (IRU) was created under the Personnel Department. The IRU is headed by a Chief Personnel Officer, called 'Officer-in-Charge IRU. Recruitment of staff with previous experience of personnel management and internal re-deployment marked the transition at Falomo. Having the Industrial Relations unit under the Personnel or Administration department was the pattern adopted by many of the operational arms of the corporation. In Warri Refinery however, a separate Industrial Relations department was created in October 1980. Unlike in Falomo -where industrial relations issues requiring approval have to pass through the Personnel Manager- the IRD in Warri enjoys elements of departmental autonomy, vis-a-vis other departments and have direct access to the Head of the Administration Division. However, the IRU has similar relation with the departments or units responsible for industrial relations matters in the operational areas; Falomo (IRU) retains the power of policy making, whilst the daily handling of interest mediation is left to the out-stations.

Membership of NECA was one of the first issues the new IRU recommended to the top management in 1980. The Unit was to rely on the advice of NECA<sup>34</sup> in drafting the Procedural Agreement with NUPENG. The agreement, finally ratified in April 1981, established two distinct lines of relations with between the union and Management; one for 'negotiation' and the other for 'consultation'. The National Joint Negotiating Council (NJNC) with power to negotiate on 'salaries and wages and other conditions of employment' (Part III, Clause IIa) handles negotiations for all the units of the corporation. A collective agreement becomes binding when signed by 4 accredited representatives of both Management and the Union. Questions of discipline, promotion and appointment were categorized as non-negotiable items.

<sup>33</sup> The 'Union' refers to NUPENG, the oil workers' (junior staff) union.

<sup>34</sup> At a two hour meeting with NECA officials (NECA Secretariat, 23 June 1980), the negotiating posture and clauses to be insisted upon were discussed; the demarcation of 'managerial prerogatives', etc. See Chs 9 & 10.



By 1985, some refinement had been brought into the framework of consultation. In the refinery for instance, there is a monthly meeting between the local union leaders and the management. A zonal consultation in the Warri area is held bi-monthly, while the national consultation takes place every three months. The venue in the latter case is rotated between the four zones. The National Joint Consultative Council (NJCC) is the third tier of consultative bodies provided for in the agreement. The other two are the local Joint Consultative Council, dealing with each operating unit like the Warri Refinery and the Zonal Joint Consultative Council (ZJCC) in each of the four zones of NNPC's operations. Each level can consult on 'the well-being of the employees', 'efficiency', etc. (Part IV, Clause II).

The agreement also establishes Individual and Collective Grievance Procedures (Part II). The former provides for a 6-step appeal procedure. The first two steps involve the individual worker making a written complaint to the immediate supervisor, and the Sectional or Departmental head where the response from the first stage is unsatisfactory. The two officers each have 3 days within which to respond. The complainant can appeal in writing to the local union official after the second stage. The official at the 4th stage submits the complaint to the head of the location or its Personnel/Administration department who has 7 days to provide a satisfactory reply to the complaint. The 5th stage is reached if the response is not satisfactory, at which stage appeal is made to the IRU in Lagos. If after the 14-day allowed for a satisfactory response from IRU fails, the issue goes at the final stage, before a regular or emergency NJNC or the NJCC meeting.

The Collective Grievance procedure on the other hand, applies to dispute on the interpretation or violation of the procedure or a collective agreement. In this case, a complaint is filed with the IRU which offers an interpretation by way of 'a written proclamation' within 14 days. (Clause IIIa) A dispute that remains unresolved is then brought before the NJNC. In line with the 1976 Trade Disputes decree, provision is made for the appointment of a mediator and a conciliator and other provisions of the decree in cases of unresolved disputes. A collective agreement is to have a life-span of two years.



#### 4.3.2.(b) Plant-Level Management: the Warri Refinery.

Warri Refinery, one of the main projects under the 2nd National Development Plan, was an important aspect of the state's new policy on the oil industry. The refinery was planned as the first, fully state-owned petroleum refining plant and to boost petroleum products production in Nigeria. In 1971, the French engineering consultancy firm BEICIP<sup>35</sup> was commissioned to undertake the feasibility study for the refinery. The terms of reference of the study included the precise location of the refinery, its operational capacity and layout. A Ministry of Mines and Power 'Second Refinery Project team' was set up to work with BEICIP. In May 1973, Snamprogetti SpA of Milan, a subsidiary of ENI, was chosen as the main contractor for the construction of the refinery. The same month, the Ministry of Mines and Power acting as the owner, initiated the negotiation of the contract with Snamprogetti. It was however 30 months later, on 31 October 1975, before a letter of intent was issued and another 5-and-half months before the contract was signed. In the meantime, the technical capacity of the refinery was increased from 70,000 bpd to 100,000 bpd. The contract negotiated by the Ministry gave Snamprogetti 'full contractual responsibility' (NNPC 1978:6) not only for the design, engineering and construction of the refinery and all its auxiliary units -e.g. the Housing Complex and roads-, but for the management of the refinery as well. The implications of the contract will be taken up shortly.

The construction work, on the 470 million naira project, started in January 1976 and was completed in June 1978. Three months later, on 26 September in an atmosphere of great celebration, the refinery was commissioned. The project also involved the construction of a mini-town to house the staff. This 'Housing Complex', located some distance from the plant has its own clinic; supermarket; sports fields, courts and swimming pool; and club house. The power and water supplies to the complex are independent of Warri township and the adjoining villages. Although planned to house all the employees of the refinery, the complex is now an exclusive residential area for senior NNPC personnel in Warri and environ. At the construction stage, a caravan camp was built just outside the

<sup>35</sup> Bureau D'Etudes Industrielles et De Cooperation De L'Institut Francais Du Petrole of Rueil Malmaison, France. (NNPC 1978, Warri Refinery n.d.)



perimeters of the refinery. The Saipem Camp,<sup>36</sup> as it is called, is currently used as office and accommodation complex.

### The Production and Organizational Layout.

The plant which produces liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), petrol, dual purpose kerosene (for domestic use and aviation fuel) and automotive gas oil -diesel and fuel oil, consists of 9 production units.<sup>37</sup> The first cluster of these units, collectively called Area I, consists of the Atmospheric Crude Distillation Unit (CDU) or Topping, the Gas Plant and the Vacuum Distillation Unit (VDU). The CDU is the first stage of the refining process where raw crude oil is treated by heat (thermal processing). The Gas Plant processes the overhead gas stream from the CDU into propane and butane (LPG), and in the VDU the residuum of the CDU are processed at very low pressure but higher temperature -than is possible in the CDU- to produce Vacuum Gas oil and Vacuum Residuum.

Three other units form the cluster called Area II. These are the Naphtha Hydrotreating Unit (NHU), the Naphtha Reforming Unit (NRU) and the Kerosene Hydrotreating Unit (KHU). The NHU further processes the heavy naphtha from the CDU with hydrogen, to produce high grade petrol fraction stock. In the NRU, the de-sulphurized naphtha from the NHU is further refined through catalytic (using chemical catalysts) and thermal processing. This produces the main elements of the premium and super grades of petrol. A similar process is used in the KHU to treat raw kerosene stock from the CDU, to produce high grade aviation jet fuel. The third cluster of production units: Area III, consists of the Fluid Catalytic Cracking Unit (FCC Unit) and the Merox Units. The latter is made up of an LPG unit and a Gasoline (Petrol) unit. The FCC Unit uses catalysts to extract gas, gas oil, decanted oil and slurry oil from the heavy gas oil produced in Area I. FCC also has a C.O. Boiler unit which supplies most of the steam for the plant's electricity generating unit. The Merox Units remove with catalysts, the sulphur in the LPG and Gasoline produced in the FCC Unit. A 10th unit, the H.F. Alkylation Unit was commissioned in 1986. The unit further refines the excess LPG produced in FCC and

<sup>36</sup> Saipem, a German firm, was a major sub-contractor in the construction of the refinery.

<sup>37</sup> My description of the technical aspects of production relies on NNPC's -and the Refinery's- publications, including the Refinery Training School manuals.



CDU by treating it with Hydrofloric Acid, hence the prefix H.F. The product, alkylate, is used in the production of high grade petrol.

Outside the producing units, there is also the Oil Movement section which takes delivery of -and stores- crude oil. The section also stores and evacuates refined products. Two oil jetties on the Warri river, supply refined products to marine tankers, and a Truck Loading Station capable of loading 360 trucks daily, handles product evacuation by road. The pipeline network is also used to evacuate refined products. The section also supplies Kaduna Refinery with crude oil through the pipeline. The storage tanks for crude oil, intermediate and finished products -collectively referred to as Tank Farm- are under the Oil Movement section. The operations of the processing units and the Tank Farm are all monitored and controlled from the Main Control Room inside the plant. The Jetty and Truck loading areas have their own independent control rooms.

The refinery also has its own Power Plant, with a generating capacity of 45 megawatts. The Water Treatment plant supplies treated water for human consumption and production needs from 4 boreholes within the refinery premises. The Waste Water Treatment plant handles the treatment of toxic liquid wastes from the processing areas before discharging them into the surrounding water ways. These three plants have their own separate control rooms and are collectively referred to as the Power Plant & Utilities. All the plants, process areas and Oil Movement section form the Production department of the Refining Division. Although in December 1985, a separate Power Plant & Utilities department was created, reference in this work will be to the pre-December organizational pattern.

The Maintenance department which handles all the repair and maintenance jobs (which do not require external contractors) has six sections. These are Mechanical, Electrical, Instruments, Civil, Fleet and Planning sections. All repairs and maintenance jobs and requests are sent directly to the Planning section which coordinates and allocates the jobs among the various operational sections. As evident in their titles, the Mechanical, Electrical and Instruments sections are responsible for maintenance of mechanical, electrical parts in the refinery respectively, while the Instrument section is responsible for maintaining process instruments, control panels etc. in the refinery. Civil and Fleet sec-



tions deal with minor civil constructions and maintenance jobs in the plant, and maintenance and repairs of vehicles, respectively. Further discussion on this department will be taken up in Chapter 5.

Within the Refining Division are other departments. The Technical Services department is the local equivalent of NNPC's Project Engineering Department. The Laboratory and Inspection & Testing section are also under this department. The Inspection & Testing section monitors the quality of jobs undertaken by the Maintenance or other units of Technical Services department. Other segments of the Refining division are the Stock Management; Programming and Control; Fire and Safety; and the Electronic Data Processing departments. The Stock Management department is the refinery's stock control and warehouse unit, it manages the warehouse and supplies all items required in all units of the refinery. Programming and Control department acts as the production planning and quality control arm of the refinery. The Fire and Safety department is charged with the industrial health, safety and fire fighting duties. Each of these duties is handled by a separate section of the department. The EDP deals with the refinery's computer service needs.

Outside the Refining Division are the Administration and Finance Divisions, Organization, Training & Manpower Development, Internal Audit, and Purchasing departments. The Administration Division has eight departments; namely the Personnel, Medical Services, Security, General Services, Industrial Relations, the Estate departments, and the Staff School. The Staff School is the preparatory and primary school in the Housing Complex for the children of the NNPC personnel living in the Complex or in Warri. The General Services department handles all cleaning activities, the mowing of the lawns, planting and grooming of decorative plants, flowers and hedges in the refinery and the housing complex. The department in addition is responsible for transport facilities in the refinery. This include acting as ticket sales and scheduling office for the use of the Corporation's -or commercial- aircrafts and handling the refinery's vehicles and drivers. The Estate department is responsible for allocating houses in the Housing Complex and the running and maintenance of the complex. The Purchasing department handles the financial paper work and purchasing end of the Stock Management



department's activities, as well as the custom and insurance clearance and payments for the refinery.

The Refinery is headed by General Manager. The divisions are headed by Managers, the Refinery Manager -head of the Refining Division- is however officially the most senior Manager. Although the departments are normally headed by someone with the rank of Deputy Manager, this depends on whether or not there is someone of that career rank available. Generally in the Refining division, especially in Production and Maintenance, sectional and unit heads are designated Superintendents and Supervisors respectively. As I explain in Chapters 5 and 6, unlike in the case of a General Manager or Manager, the title of Superintendent or Supervisor is functional rather than a career rank.

In operational terms, PPMD is the link between the Refinery and the rest of NNPC: PPMD supplies the crude oil for processing and takes care of the refined products, using the Refinery as a contractor. To this end, weekly and monthly production are planned with officials of the PPMD. This is supplemented by daily meetings, at 0800 hours between the PPMD and the Refining Division's top officials, at which the production plan are reviewed. The PPMD does not, however, pay the Refinery for processing the crude oil, rather the NNPC -at the corporate level- provides the Refinery with annual (operating) subvention. This subvention rose from 15.73 million naira in 1979 to 34.23 million naira in 1983. On the other hand the Refinery's figures shows that the 'commercial value' of its products rose from 161.06 million naira in 1979 to 463.54 million naira in 1982 but dropped to 321.36 million naira in 1983. The drop reflects the reduction in the quantity of crude oil processed in the periods: 4.11 million tons in 1982 as against 3.18 million tons in 1983. A rider to these figures is that the subvention does not obviously include the cost of the crude oil and the 'commercial value' refers to the retail point price.<sup>38</sup> Unlike NNPC at the corporate level, the Refinery publishes its annual reports, which besides the figures cited here also provide information on production, personnel matters, work accidents, etc.

<sup>38</sup> All figures in the NNPC Refinery Warri Annual Reports.



**The Refinery Project, Technology & Control: some comments.**

At this stage two general comments on the refinery which are salient for the subsequent discussions, need to be made. First is the inter-dependent nature of operations within the refinery. The second concerns the implications, and legacies, of the contract for the construction and management of the refinery, signed by the officials of the Ministry of Mines and Power. The integrated nature of process activities is such that what happens in one unit is closely bound up with developments elsewhere in the plant. Except in units dealing with intermediate or semi-finished products -e.g. FCC unit-, a breakdown in one production unit could easily bring production in the whole plant to a stand still. The storage of intermediate products in the Tank Farm was designed to avert such scenario, nonetheless the tanks can only hold stock for about two to four days. The implications for the moment, are two fold. In a peripheral economy like Nigeria's, minor technical problems tend to acquire a significance out of proportion with the size of those problems. While in a different context the problem would be solved by simply placing an order for the faulty parts with a firm across town, in the peripheral economy, large stock of spares parts have to be kept or ordering them would run into weeks, if not months to come through. Technological dependence acquire a vividness and generate an intense anger and frustration among the immediate operatives which a more intellectual discussion of dependence may not always capture. Many of these frustration and anger will become evident in the subsequent chapters. In addition, particularly among shop floor Operatives, the inter-dependence of operations give a distinct resonance to the worth of the workers' labour which might not be easily visible in a different production context. Both of the above dimensions, give the nature of work relations and workplace struggles a distinct political resonance, disproportional to the size of the workforce.

The second comment on the contract with Snamprogetti can be treated in two separate parts. First is the question of technology which links up with the earlier comment. The second concerns the agreement to give Snamprogetti the management contract for the refinery. The technology adopted for the FCC unit vividly illustrates the first dimension. The attraction of a catalytic cracking process for further refining of the residuum from CDU, is the greater yield per quantity of crude oil that is achieved. This



would have been impossible using heat -i.e. thermal refining process-, which was the technology in use in the 1965 Port Harcourt refinery. However the particular technology adopted, the Kellogg orthoflow design, was a new and complex one. Only two other refineries had adopted the US design when it was installed at Warri.<sup>39</sup> The implications of adopting an unproven design, though bearing the tag of 'the latest technology', in a peripheral economy was to aggravate the aspects of technological dependence that I mentioned earlier. In the case of the Kellogg design, it turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. In the first year of operation (1979), only 19% of the unit's capacity was utilized (NNPC Refinery Warri 1979). While the utilized capacity went up from 24.2% in 1980 to 55.5% in 1982 (NNPC RW 1980, 1982), in 1983 it dropped to 30.9%. The primary design faults which had been plaguing the unit finally brought it to a stand still from December 1984 to the end of 1985.

Another US firm, the Universal Oil Products Company, was commissioned to produce an expensive feasibility study of the unit and redesign the key parts of the unit.<sup>40</sup> This is to demonstrate a wide-spread problem in the refinery which has its roots in the contract for the plant. In giving Snamprogetti, the 'full contractual responsibility' for the project (NNPC 1978:6), the Ministry, acting for the State, abdicated even the minimal responsibility of a self-respecting bourgeoisie-in-ascendence. As it turned out, virtually every item used in the construction of the refinery was imported, down to the sand used in its construction. Even from the point of view of stimulating local capitalist economy by generating demand, the 'multiplier' effect of the multi-million naira construction project was nil. The crisis of Italian designed and built office and residential blocks, which had to be expensively re-adapted to the tropical situation, illustrates the point about the abdication of responsibility. On the technical side, in December 1985, seven years after the refinery was commissioned, the Milan head office of Snamprogetti still had to be contacted when crucial repair or maintenance job had to be done. In this case, as in every other aspect of the refinery, the Italian firm refused to hand over the vital design or flow charts of instruments and process operations of the refinery. What these illustrate again

<sup>39</sup> One was in Mexico and the other in the US. (Field Interview Sources)

<sup>40</sup> UOP 1985, Warri Refinery Fluid Catalytic Cracking Feasibility Report, Effurun: NNPC (mimeo). The effect on work relations is discussed in Chapter 8.



is that, we have a productive element of the economy which remains a territorial extension of the 'metropolitan' capitalism's sphere of production. (See Chapter 3.)

The other aspect of this discussion is the management agreement built into the contract. Snamprogetti, as the 'technical partner', would manage the refinery and train the Nigerian personnel who would take over the running of the plant. From 1978 to 1981 all the superintendents, supervisors, and control room operators were Snamprogetti's Italian personnel. Until 1980, the same applied in the case of departmental and divisional heads, except in the case of the administrative sections and the post of General Manager. But it was the issues of racial harassment and the shopfloor suspicion that the expatriate personnel were more interested in retaining their lucrative contract than in 'training' the Nigerian personnel, that led to a spate of shop floor revolt. This was central to the exit of the ENI subsidiary from the technical direction of production by 1983. The revolts are also central to many aspects of work relations, as I will make clearer in later discussions.

### Conclusion.

I have, in the preceding sections, outlined the development of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation historically, as a product of changing state policy on the petroleum industry. This in itself forms the background to the subsequent discussions in this thesis. I have tried to outline the very political and economic context in which NNPC emerged and the extent to which it remains bound up within those processes. As the under-current of the subsequent discussions, it allows one to place within the wider political context, issues that might otherwise look pedestrian. The context of work relations or aspects of workers/union and management relations are, as soon as they emerge or they are articulated, bound-up within the wider political context of NNPC as a major 'national institution' and a rapidly expanding state-capital. For an economy dependent on petroleum earnings and in a corporation which is at the heart of both the generation of that revenue and oil industry production activities, work relations take on an added significance not evident in other segments of the economy. Issues of workers/management relations, or for that matter strike action, immediately take on a significance that is both political and economic. Economic in the sense that this is the life line of the nation. To a great



extent therefore, the study of work relations within NNPC and the relations themselves go beyond the confines of a single-industry or single-workplace study or relations. They deal with, and affect, the very basis of the Nigerian economy and political life.

With respect to NNPC as a rapidly expanding unit of state-capital, employment in NNPC is not simply another public-sector job. Central to the work relations, especially in the refinery's case, is a capital-labour relation. This is fundamentally a Value relation, the germ of which is commodity production. However because what is involved is state-capital, the Value relation is mediated by nationalistic arguments and the absence of an identifiable capitalist class or group in the classical sense. Even for the most powerful persons in the corporation, power and managerial dominance are as transient as the next change of government. The mediation of Value relations by the national status of the employing unit of capital (i.e. state-capital) or the transience of its most important functionaries, throws up a reverse effect from the workers' side; namely the demand (or expectation) to be treated as human beings and not mere objects of production, essentially because as state-capital, 'NNPC belong to all of us'. These and other issues will emerge in the following chapters.

**PART II:**  
**THE DYNAMICS OF THE LABOUR PROCESS.**



## Chapter 5.

### THE NATURE OF WORK: work and the organization of work.

#### Introduction.

In this chapter, I will be looking at the nature and organization of work. The focus is on the Refinery, with consideration also of the situation in the Lagos Headquarters of NNPC: this provides a comparative dimension to the analysis of work in the Refinery. Work in Falomo is predominantly an administrative, office-based labour process; in a city with a rhythm quite distinct in many ways from that of Warri. The chapter is divided into four sections; in section one, I discuss the 'terrain' of work, both in Falomo and Warri. The narrative style of this discussion derives from my intention is to convey to the reader the pictures of the Refinery and Falomo, with all the sensation aroused in me when I first stepped into them; this sets the tone (pictorially) of the discussion that follows. In section two, I discuss the organization of work, in Warri and Falomo with special attention to the former.

Section three discusses the nature of work as well as a report of some of the survey findings, and finally in section four, I discuss the problem of work hazard in the refinery. This is an aspect of work that is rarely discussed in both the LPD and Industrial Relations literature, but which is of serious concern to the workers. The discussion in this chapter forms the empirical basis for some of the issues raised in Chapters 1 and 2, and which will be raised in subsequent chapters.

#### 5.1. The Terrain Of Work.

The approach to the Refinery, during day time, reveals a sprawling wire-fence complex. To the left edge of the complex is the Truck Loading area, about the size of three football pitches. There are the loading bays, the Tanker lorries parking lot and three office units built like concrete village halls; here tanker lorries are supplied with refined petroleum products. Behind this, and within the second wire-fence perimeters of



the refinery, is the Tank Farm. The white spherical gas tanks perched on steel legs, squattish cylindrical tanks, are temporary homes for liquefied refined products; this is the western wing of the Farm. The tanks, in their white coating, give the impression of growing right out of the sandy soil -a reminder of the land reclamation effort which preceded the construction of the refinery. To the left of the complex, construction work is going on; here will stand the country's first petrochemical complex.

From the main approach, the refinery itself is a spectacle of organized chaos; an array of silvery columns of different heights and shapes, stretching out to the skies, and steel columns puffing smoke to the sky. To the far north-west of the complex is the tallest structure in the plant: the flaring column -nicknamed Devil's Torch- belching out full flame every 0.97 seconds. The spectacle at night is even more glorious, the dark adjoining areas glow in rhythm to the flame of Devil's Torch; the security lights flood the complex perimeters. From a distance, the Plant is decked in a multitude of tiny lights, like a giant christmas tree, but here, it is no Christmas!.

The first gate is manned by the Security Guards, in trousers and pale green shirts, cut in military style with olive green berets; they check that there is no unauthorised entry or exit. To the left, after the gate, is the parking lot for employees with cars, this area is marked off with finely groomed hedges and there are still more hedges to the right. The outer one runs the length of the fence, forming a reverse half triangle. The inner hedge, cut in triangular shape, marks the left edge of the Drive-in and the right edge of the disembarking point for workers bussed to work. At the end, some thirty yards from the gate, is the neatly laid-out, two-storey Administration Block; the tarmac road, bordered in zebra colours, swings back to the gate at its entrance. Only the VIP and chauffeured Managers' vehicles come here. The traffic island -with its surrealist sculpture and the national and NNPC colours, fluttering in the breeze- separates the block from the senior Managers' car lot.

Inside the building, the blazing tropical air outside suddenly gives way to cool air and the humming of the central air cooling system; the hard tarmac is replaced with lush carpet and the reception desk is to the right. The ground and first floors house some of



the departments; the Managers occupy the top floor. The Plant workers call it 'The White House', and it has nothing to do with the colour!.

The main entrance to the plant, to the left of the Administration Block, is guarded, mainly, by Corporation's security personnel but often there are three or more soldiers on hand, -in field gears and armed with M16 rifles- from the Army barrack about 2 kilometers away. On the gate are the notices reading;

**"NO ADMITTANCE TO UNAUTHORISED PERSONS"**

**"ALL VEHICLES ENTERING THE PLANT MUST BE FITTED WITH SPARK  
SUPPRESSORS"**

**"ALL PERSONS ENTERING ARE SUBJECT TO SEARCHING"**

You are also warned to hand in matches, lighters and cameras to the security personnel before entering the plant: all for fire prevention purpose. Pedestrians enter through the door of the attached Security office. On the racks, inside, are the Junior Workers' attendance cards and six new clocking machines, installed at the cost of nearly 56,000 naira, each(!) in March 1985; more efficient, more accurate and above all, sabotage-proof. "You can't force pins, coins and other metal objects, through the slots of these ones", someone later told me. Here, identification cards -or entry papers- are checked and vehicles and persons entering or leaving are also searched. The "security system", as the Public Relations department's pamphlet notes, "is elaborate in terms of organization and coverage... Interest in and activities relating to security of the Refinery in fact go beyond the local level in the governmental system". No understanding of the social relations of work will be adequate without an appreciation of the role of the Security Unit.

Once inside the Plant, one is met by the rumbling and high pitch noises of the Process Plants. The main road into the Plant - Road A- divides the Plant into two halves, on the right are the plant Clinic, next to the Security office. Further down the road are Process Plants with its various units, the Laboratory, the Power Plant and the Water Treatment unit, all connected by the network of roads. Apart from the wide space which separates the Canteen from the Clinic and the back of the Administration building, the groo-



med hedges and green lawns suddenly give way to hard tarmac, patches of weeds straining out from the edges of concrete floors and the metal structures that is the Plant.

On the left side of Road A, is the Maintenance Building with the Warehouse attached to it. The Maintenance building houses the Workshops and the Maintenance Planning offices on the ground floor and the Technical Services, Programming and Control departments and the Library are on the 1st Floor. Further down the road is a section of the Oil Movement Unit's Tank Farm and product movement; from crude oil receipt to the evacuation of refined products by road, waterways or the pipelines. The Fire and Safety department building at the end of Road A, houses the Fire Control Room, the Fire engines park and the office accommodation of the Industrial safety and hygiene half of the department. The Jetty is about 5.3 kilometers (3.3 miles) from the Process areas.

If the Refinery sits on an exclusive terrain, removed from Warri township, Falomo is hardly anything of the sort. It is in the busy commercial edge of the affluent part of Lagos; Ikoyi and the adjoining Victoria Island. The very rich of Lagos, the top civil/military bureaucrats and senior managers of the Multinationals live here. Situated at the main intersection of roads, its back to the lagoon waterways, the headquarters stands 11 pale stories high. The corporation arrived here at the end of the 1970's to put its offices, scattered all over Lagos, under a single roof, not that it has succeeded, but most of them are here now. The main entrance, bordered by the flyover linking Ikoyi and Victoria Island, has its security men on duty, a make-shift 'office' tucked under the flyover.

Two right turns -and two gates so far- one comes to the entrances of the building; evidence of efforts to tame the soil abounds. There are two doors here: the first one for visitors, the second for employees. From here, a visitor goes through three different security checks. Like in Warri, employees wear their identity tags on their clothes, permanently displayed. The ground floor reception area, with its leather settee, carpet, the pictorial history of the Corporation, and the scaled-down model of the oil-rig 'Forex Neptune Tuma 1' -symbol of NNPC's indigenous exploration effort-, conveys the oil-rich image of the NNPC. The other floors, however, could come as a shock: pale yellow partitions divides the floor space into three rows which are cut into offices. If there is power cut, the middle rows hardly get any sunlight. There are dusty piles of papers and files on



many corridors, peeling wall paints and cramped corridors. The opulence never returns until the 10th floor which accommodates the Managing Director and the Minister; if you come here directly in the lift, you never notice the difference.

Office accommodation varies. The higher one is in the corporation's hierarchy, the more spacious, more private, more comfortable one's office is: like who's office gets an air conditioning unit instead of an electric fan. At the lower end of the hierarchy, 8 to 10 people have to share an office. The Finance payroll unit on the 5th floor, with its open plan office, has rows of tables and chairs stretching from wall to wall, overflowing with papers. On the second floor hangs a clock-in machine that was never used; a symbol of the successful battle the junior staff union fought against its operation in 1980.

Compared with Falomo, the Warri Administration Block remains fairly true to its ground floor image. The lush carpet remains, so does the humming of the air cooling system, but here as well, office accommodation becomes more private, more comfortable the higher the occupier is in the hierarchy. The top floor offices of the Heads have their ante-rooms and Secretaries. At the rear they overlook the Plant, at the front the approach to the Refinery. The Operations Chiefs stay in the plant, the administrative managers may never have to step in, the closest a Clerk may get to the plant is the canteen.

## 5.2. The Organization of Work.

In Chapter 4, I explained the organization of the Refinery from the top-most post of the General Manager to that of Superintendents who head Sections in the Maintenance department or Process Areas in the Production department. I will therefore commence the discussion from where it broke off in that earlier chapter.<sup>1</sup> The discussion here will concern the Production, the Mechanical departments, and the administrative units, to a lesser extent.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendixes D (i) to D (iii) for the organizational charts.



### 5.2.1. The Organization of Work: the Refining Division.

Each of the Production and Maintenance departments is divided into operational units, headed by Superintendents. In Production, there are 4 such units called 'Plant', and in Maintenance there are 7 units referred to as 'Sections'.

In the Production department a Plant covers broad areas of operational specialization; Process Plant A for instance, covers Areas 1 and 2, and Process Plant B involves Areas 3. Each Area, which deals with a specific stage in the refining process -see Chapter 4-, is under a Supervisor. Directly below the Supervisor is the Chief Operator, who is the head of each of the four Shift Crews. It is people in this grade downwards who work shifts.

The Chief Operator, as the shift crew head, directs the operations in the Control Room as well as in the Plant. Under him is the Boardman who is responsible for the process panels in the Control Room, although the Chief Operator stays in the Control Room most of the time; the rest of the crew is made up of the (External) Plant Operators. In Area 1, where I worked most of the time, there is an average 15 persons per shift. Thirteen of them are Plant Operators who remain in the plant, under the direction of the Area Operator, usually the most experienced Plant operator. Unlike the Chief Operator, the position of the Area Operator is more of "breaking-in" new (Trainee) Operators and lending his/her expertise to problems requiring immediate attention. Although a supervisory role, it does not carry any power of coercion. The Operators here are titled according to the instrument/unit they are charged with; Heaterman, Pumpman, or Compressor, etc.

Beside clocking-in at the Plant gate (and reporting at their units to relieve the previous Shift), Operators have to register their presence by signing the attendance register in the Control Room. If during the period of the shift, any operator had anything to do in other parts of the Plant, say the Administration Block, a special permit has to be obtained. Authorization can only be given by the sectional or departmental head, and in the case of shift workers, by the Shift leader. The time range is so tightly controlled that the 'authorising officer' has to write, in the exact form, the time permission was granted. The reason for the permission is stipulated, and the officer visited would indicate, in the



form, the time the Operator came in and the time he/she left; and at the gate the form is checked by the Security guards. It is officially the only condition -barring emergencies- under which workers can leave the Plant. The form is collected when the Operator returns to the Plant by the Security personnel. At the end of the day all exit papers are collected by the Discipline and Attendance unit's staff for vetting.

In the Maintenance department, the hierarchy of work organization is largely the same. As Appendixes D (i) and D (ii) shows, there are six sections in this department, based on operational specialization. The Mechanical section, for example, deals with all mechanical jobs in the Refinery; from pumps and compressors to welding. The Fleet section repairs and maintains nearly all the Refinery vehicles; from the official saloon cars to the Fire engines. The Instrument section handles all 'instruments', from the clock-in machines to electronic circuit cards.

Each section is further divided into subsections, presumably, to ensure the most efficient allocation of personnel and resources. In the Instruments section, there are two such subsections; the Workshop and the 'Plant and the Off-site'. The latter handles instruments maintenance in the plants, the Jetty, the Truck loading area and the Housing complex. Each subsection is under a Supervisor and in each subsection are the 'specialization' units headed by a Foreman. The Workshop subsection, for instance, has four specializations; the electronics, pneumatics, analyzer and telecom workshops. The Plant & Off-site subsection is divided into three units; the Off-site, Power Plant & Utilities and the Process Plant units. Each of the seven foremen has a crew of Technicians<sup>2</sup> under him. Although the nature of work differs in each unit the work organization and control are the same.

As in the case of the Plant Operators, the movement of Maintenance workers outside the Plant is covered by the rules I discussed earlier. The process of labour is controlled both at the departmental and unit levels. A maintenance job in any area of the complex is subject to the issuance of a 'Work Request' (see Appendix I), by the needy section. All work requests are channeled through the Planning Section of the Maintenance

<sup>2</sup> The label 'technician' is a general term, used in the department, for people below the rank of Foreman, rather than a 'skill' or qualification label.



department; the job is then inspected by Technicians from Planning, and on the basis of their assessment allocate manhours for the job. At the beginning of every week a 'Gantt Chart'; listing the jobs and the allocated man-hours, is sent to each unit. The base line of man-hours per week is 40 per person in the unit. A unit that does not fill its quota for the week is 'in deficit', which is carried onto the following week, until the balance is reached. There is no rule against going over the 40-hour per individual limit, which is recurrent, so long as you do not owe the Refinery.

The Foreman allocates the jobs based on the Gantt Chart outline. The only exception to the above procedure is the 'emergency work request'; this is for jobs requiring immediate attention or at the weekend when the Planning section is closed. The work request is dispatched directly to the maintenance unit and Planning section is informed later. The man-hours spent on such jobs are added to the unit's weekly allocation.

A work permit is granted after the job is allocated and then signed by both the unit Foreman and the head of the requesting section; the Chief Operator in Shift areas. The work request form is in quadruplicate, a copy each for the Issuing Unit, for its 'internal use'; Planning; the Foreman, for his roster and record and the 'Gang Leader' of the work crew. (see Appendixes I (i) to (iv)). No work is 'completed' until the Chief Operator signs it off and the hours spent on the job must be indicated by the Chief Operator.

There is however a more general form of work organization and supervision of labour expenditure, which binds the two departments. The Refinery even if not counting the naira and kobo, is concerned with commodity production. Production planning, as I earlier indicated (Ch.4), is undertaken with PPMD officials. Monthly and weekly production plans are supplemented with the daily production review meetings between the PPMD personnel and the heads of the operational units. These meetings are held around 0800, every morning. At 1000, the Heads meet the sectional leaders; Superintendents and Supervisors in Production and the former in Maintenance. In some units like the Oil Movement the day's work can only begin after the 10 o'clock meeting. This is because it is at the meeting that unit heads are informed of changes in production plans which may affect the grades of user-end products PPMD requires. In the Process Plants however, it



hardly matters although it may mean adjusting the through-put in one section or the other.

At a more detailed level, work organization and supervision involve the corps of Shift Supervisors (mainly ex-Chief Operators). They monitor the performance of work; attendance among shift workers; operators, maintenance workers and those on Call Duty. The Shift Superintendent heads this group.

### **5.2.2 The Organization of Work: the Administration Division.**

In the administrative section, few units, except the Security department, match the attempt at detailed organization and monitoring of work that prevails in Production and Maintenance. Work organization and monitoring often depend on the size of the workforce. The Industrial Relations department in Warri for instance, employs only two persons, both 'senior staff'. The IRD's Secretary is under the General Services department, as is every typist, secretary, driver, office attendant and cleaner in the refinery; the monitoring of work is therefore far from detailed. In the Personnel department, on the other hand, most of the workers are in the Personnel Registry where they are under a supervisory officer. The same applies to similar offices in Finance & Accounts, Purchasing etc, and in most of the offices in Falomo with large numbers of 'junior staff'. Although one may observe a less detailed monitoring of labour-power expenditure, it would be false to imagine its absence. Like the Plant workers, 'junior' workers in Warri clock-in when they arrive in the morning and clock-out at the end of the day's work. 'Senior staff' employees on the other hand, sign-in and -off in the attendance register, outside the security office (for those working in the Plant) or at the reception desk (for those working in Administration). At Falomo, attendance registers are kept in the office of the head of a unit and both 'junior' and 'senior' staff sign-in and -off everyday. Monitoring often involves the boss personally checking on the workers.

In both Warri and Falomo there is provision for the lunch break; one hour in Falomo and, officially, half-an-hour in Warri; between 1100 and 1300 hours in Warri, and 1200 and 1300 hours in Falomo. To avoid congestion in the canteens, lunch time is rotated among the different departments; production workers however, have sections of the vari-



ous Control Rooms set aside as mini-canteens, this ensures that workers are never far from the work points, even when officially on break. Control Rooms personnel eat in shifts, which means someone is always by the panel. The difference in break periods means that a normal day's work officially ends at 1600 hours in Warri and 1630 hours in Falomo.

### 5.3. The Nature Of Work.

Life on the Plant shopfloor is marked by both uniformity and differentiation. There are workers in blue or green boilersuits, protective boots and protective helmets of different colours; these gears distinguish the non-'white-collar' job workers from others. One soon notices that the Production workers wear the green boilersuits and the Maintenance workers the blue ones. There are some who ride in VW Beetle cars and carry walkie-talkies,<sup>3</sup> even when dressed in boilersuits and protective gears: these are usually Supervisors or Foremen. Since the cars and walkie-talkies are attached to Supervisory posts they give the impression of being symbols of power. The purpose of this section is to go beyond the obvious and explore the nature of work from the perspective of the direct producers; the workers. In the final part of this section I also look at the nature of shift work.

#### 5.3.1. In The Control Room.

For many workers in the Refinery, work starts at 0730 hours and the offices close at 1600 hours. In the Plant, however, there are no closing hours, only a circulation of workers between shifts. For those on morning shift, work starts at 0700, when the night shift is relieved. The Boardmen from resumption to the end of the shift, remains at the control Panel, from where they monitor process operations. Here, 'skill' depends on being able to tell instinctively when a particular trend, indicated on the panel, is a prelude to crisis. In many instances -on instruments with panel control knobs- the refining process could be regulated from the panel through the Pressure Indicator & Controls (PICs) or the Flow Recorder & Controls (FRCs). Many of the panel spaces are however often Indicators

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<sup>3</sup> Because of the size of the complex and the production requirement -communication are via the walkie-talkies. The sectional heads depend on the VW cars to move around.



and Recorders, and in these cases regulating or altering the refining process depends on the Plant Operators. To rectify any malfunction the Boardman calls the Plant Operator's attention on the Hailers installed around the plants. The Operator then goes to any of the telephone stands for the instructions.

A Control Room may sometimes give a deceptive image of comfort and peace. If one is coming from the Plant it does seem like a different world away from the noise and pollution of the Plant. The air conditioning system also provides a relief from the heat of the tropical sun, and the room, a shelter during rainfall. In the Main Control Room (MCR) for instance, are the desks of the Boardmen and the Chief Operators. The Boardman, it seems, do no more than turn knobs and make log entries of each shift; almost the ideal terrain of Sabel's 'intellectualized skill',<sup>4</sup> but that will be no more than a 'tourist' view. This aspect of an Operator's work is 'non-physical' as Blauner (1964:132) argues, but that neglects other dimensions of the job. After a few weeks, you start to notice and feel the tension that the work entails. For a Boardman, it is eight hours (or nine, during night shift) of being glued to the panel, even on best of days the tension rarely subsides. It is often impossible to know which equipment will malfunction; watching a panel is hardly like waiting for the Halley's comet affair. This contributes a great deal to the tension, not the least because of the highly integrated nature of the various operations and units; a slight malfunction in one area that is not immediately arrested could severely hit every other unit. With the built-up pressure due to inadequate sleep the previous night, being fully alert on the second day of a night shift takes a tremendous effort.

The CO Boiler unit of FCC, for example supplies steam to both the Power Plant and other units of the Refinery. On the Area 3 board, the unit's panels are just two of 32 display panels; each measuring 2 by 6 inches, but for Ojay, the Boardman, they are nothing to neglect, even when he felt tired;

sake of dis small t'in, you mus'to open eye. MUST!, because if anyt'in' com' happen di time wey you close eye small, na wahala bi dat. 'E fit scatter everyt'in.

because of this small thing, you have to keep your eyes open. MUST!, if anything happens while you're taking a nap that could mean trouble. It can trip the whole plant.

<sup>4</sup> When 'skill... comes to be defined as the capacity not to perform certain operation by hand but to instruct a machine to perform the necessary manipulation'. (Sabel 1982:67)



The unit's supply of steam could be disrupted by the failure of just one of the Boiler's burners. As he explains, the unit generates 45 tons of steam per hour for the network, the failure of one of the burners would mean a drop in the through-put. This could cause a 'flow-back'; a sort of sucking-in effect. The first area that will be affected is the Power Plant and this could trip-off the power within seconds, causing a general power failure. For a continuous-process plant, that is bad news, for the Boardman, his job could be on the line.

Ojay might be able to isolate the panel quickly, because most of the FCC units were out of operation at the time. But under normal circumstances, he would be watching 32 different panels, eight or ten hours a day, any of which could spring "a surprise". Area 1 has 48 such panels crammed into a space of less than 10 by 4 feet. It is hardly the laid-back job that the process technology PR piece (vide Nichols & Beynon 1976:xii-xiii) or an 'intellectualized' labour might suggest. On days when there are operational problems or equipment malfunction, you could feel the adrenalin splashing all over the walls; the apprehension is not always misplaced. In one evening alone, the compressor alarm went off seven times within one-and-half hours, each time bringing everybody to full alert, and people dashing around to rectify the problem, sometimes, on very tiny parts of the equipment. As one of the Area Supervisors told me;

You'll be surprised, common compressor bearing, tiny things, like this, costing maybe 5p, have shut-down Reforming for over 3 weeks before.

His colleague, the Area 1 Supervisor, a former Supervisor at FCC unit said;

What of carbon ring... at FCC?. Look they are so tiny, eh?, you can put ten in this pocket. [indicating his breast pocket] It led to shutting-down the Unit for 2 weeks. What of the Vacuum unit?, just because of a mechanical seal we have been forced to shut it down.

However, 'shutting down' a unit is not just putting it aside and going home. In most cases, it meant the Boardman, the Chief Operator, the Supervisor and the Area Superintendent staying on till the repair job is done; from about 1900 hours on Friday (30-9-85) till the early morning of Monday. For the Boardman and Chief Operator, it was the end of any hope of enjoying a rest period after their night shift. The cool temperature of the CRs -which I mentioned earlier- may also mislead the 'tourist researcher', it is there



for the workers, but merely incidental. Once when a Chief Operator complained about feeling chilly -from the cold air- someone across the room said;

You t'ink say na because of you deh  
put 'am 'dere?. Na for di machine,  
bo.

You think it's because of you they  
have it?. It's for the instruments,  
mate.

It was a comment I was to hear quite a number of times later, here and in Maintenance. Unlike a Supervisory or Management person's office, you cannot close the duct or switch off the unit because the temperature is too low for you.

The Boardman may have a chair and share the desk with the Chief Operator, but the work hardly allows for seating. In addition to what Sheke, the Area 2 Boardman, calls 'policing of the panel', he, like other Boardmen, takes charge of communicating messages to the Operators: the general intercoms, taking official telephone messages etc. It is not uncommon to be on the phone when the an instrument alarm trips off; he either has to drop the phone immediately to attend to panel or shout for help from the nearest Boardman or Chief Operator. In a large place like the MCR, it might be easy, in other places like Waste Water cleaning or Water Treatment Control Rooms, with one Boardman in the room it is hardly 'having fun on the job'. In an emergency, it is almost mind bending; in addition to the tension, there is the way in which the job tears you in different directions. People have to deal with it, often in violation of the laid down rules, but within limits set by this organization of commodity production. As Gallie (1978:104) notes, automation does not make problems at work disappear, it generates different ones. An evaluation of the nature of labour expenditure in the Control Room, without the psychological pressure -sometimes quite traumatic- that goes along with it would be missing the essential part of this work. Although Blauner (1964:136) acknowledged this, its implication for a distinct type of exhaustion at work (cf. Gallie 1978:81) or social relations in work was left unexplored. While Gallie's evaluation goes beyond Blauner's, in many ways, he fails to recognise its significance. Workers have devised their method of coping with it, some of which I will discuss later.



### 5.3.2. The Plant Operator.

In the Plant, it is quite difficult to square the experience of the Operators with Blauner's image of them. The process technology in use here, is of a later generation, of automation, compared with those in the plants Blauner, Wedderburn and Crompton (1972) and Gallie (1978) studied. One can therefore assume even a higher level of 'intellectualized' labour.

Relative to the construction industry, for instance, there is no doubt that the work of an Operator is less physical. For most of the time, it entails monitoring the instruments. The Control panel may indicate a drop in the temperature of the Crude Distillation Unit's furnace (heater), it cannot tell when nozzles of the lines feeding fuel oil to the heater are dripping extremely hot oil to the base of the heater; this could quite easily combust with the gases around and burst into flame. The panel cannot tell of a slight increase in the vibration of the Ljungstrom which could spell disaster, for that, someone is needed on the spot. As I mentioned earlier, each Operator is assigned a specific equipment to tend, hypothetically, s/he is supposed to be near the equipment throughout the shift. The job also involves taking readings of the gauges, midway through the shift and just before the shift ends -an apparently 'intellectualized' labour.

It is difficult for me to imagine work in Area 1, for instance, where I spent a great deal of my working period in Production, without the greasy, slimy nature of the work. In areas where there are persistent drips of oily substances -and the furnace is not the only place- warm water is mostly used to disperse the patches, the result is large tracks of very wet oily patches on the ground. This highly corrosive, oily substance, flows into the sewage system through the grids, but it does not make life any easier. Within the first couple of weeks before I received safety boots, I worked in my pair of tennis shoes, within a week, the rubber soles were badly twisted- though my workmates warned me from the beginning to look for a very cheap pair of shoes. To imagine that you could go through three days of work without your boilersuit not gathering heavy doses of grease and dirt would be laughable here. The working (hand) gloves, after contacts with the valves, the pipes, the pumps etc, have a way of wearing off in a short period, the work is neither non-physical as Blauner projects it. Opening or closing of valves is hardly like



turning a key in a keyhole. In spite of the use of grease to ease the threads, turning the wheels that activate the opening and closing of the valve could be quite a hard job. The Maintenance department had to fabricate a tool<sup>5</sup> for opening valves. It takes some pressure on the wheel to open or close the valves. If the tool slips, the chances are very high that you will end up with bruises.

Taking readings of the valves, for Geepe (Vacuum Unit Operator) means clambering up and down tall columns, every four hours. For Operators in the Tank Farm this is even more prevalent. Geepe has cut round that by standing on a landing and reading gauges from there, but as he said, it needs getting used to and good sight, to know the approximate position of the needles from the distance. Even then it violates the rules and may lead to punishment if he is caught. As I will argue later, when people 'acclimatize' to work, they do not do so in idle submission, they also 'acclimatize' the job to themselves, (cf. Burawoy 1979, ch.5; Baldamus 1961) if within limits.

More than so far discussed, it is difficult to imagine the work of an Operator without the daily subjection to the high level of air pollution from numerous chemicals around, like naphtha, tetraethyl lead, caustic soda solution or gases like chlorine and hydrogen sulphide. Also the noise level from the rumbling noise of the overhead Air Cooling fans in Area 1, to the high pitched noise of compressors in the Reforming and FCC units. It is quite impossible to imagine working life of an Operator without all these and the claustrophobic feelings of being crammed between pipes, columns and instruments and the heat. You do not need to work in the heater area to feel the heat. There is the background heat of the sun and the heat generated from numerous Heat Exchangers and pipes conveying hot products. In-line temperatures go above 500 degrees celsius in many areas and the insulation of the lines does not prevent some of that seeping out. It is common to find Operators stripped to the waist, most afternoons, in attempts to cope with the heat. On my first day in the Process Area, Geepe was asked to introduce me to the Area 1; during the trip, he mentioned that the metal cubicle was provided as shelter from the

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<sup>5</sup> This is made of iron billet: the handle, which is about 18 to 24 inches long has two shot rods welded -perpendicular- to one end of the billet. The rods are positioned 2 inches apart, facing same direction. The idea is to hook the twin-rods to the valve wheel and apply pressure on the handle, to turn the wheel.



rain, just the previous year. I asked how they managed to survive the rain before that and why it was not provided earlier. His response was;

Ah, deh naw get regard for we, deh naw care di t'in wey happen to you, so far di work naw stop. Before, eh! we dey hide under di column, hide for towerside, but if di rain dey too much, na so e go beat us. If na sun na so e go beat man, o... Even di shed, deh suppose to furnish am, put telephone, but deh naw put anyt'in.

Ah, they have no feeling for us, they don't care what happens to you as long as the work doesn't stop. Earlier we had to shelter under the columns and beside the columns when it rained. But when it got heavy, it would beat you all the same. Same with the sun. Even the shed we're given ought to have chairs, telephone, etc. but they've provided none.

The phrase "deh naw get regard for we", recurred many times throughout my stay. Securing the cubicles followed protracted protests, being able to shelter inside is a continuous focus of shopfloor protests and action. The explanation of a Superintendent was that they were employed to work, not stay under shelter. All this contributes towards the physically and mentally exhausting working day, in ways that most analyses of process technology work fail to recognise.

There is however a different but very significant dimension to the work of an Operator, which extends to the Boardman or the Chief Operator; as an Area Supervisor once put it;

No two refineries anywhere in the world are the same, what this job requires is knowing which valve to turn and at what rate when anything happens, and these people [the Operators] have it.

What the job entails is sometimes called 'a sixth sense' (Gallie 1978:214); it is the capacity to sense a problem even before it emerges. Manwaring & Wood (1985:171-193) call it 'the ghost in the labour process' or 'tacit skill'. Even with the high level of multiple noise, the Operators can isolate the noise of each instrument. They respond almost by instinct to variations in vibration or noise level, to the slight change in the colour of the smoke from the Ljungstrom chimney for instance and tell you it is a slight change in the quality of combustion inside the heater, etc. In May 1985, the failure of the senior personnel to respond quick enough to a report by Douglass, Area 1 Operator, of changes in the vibration in the Ljungstrom air ejector fan's casement, resulted in a mechanical explosion. The shrapnel from the explosion tore into the adjoining instruments causing a fire outbreak. The result was the shut down of Area 1, which caused nearly two months short-



age of domestic gas in the country;<sup>6</sup> but on most occasions it is less drastic in its implications. Take the gauge readings for example, to the trained Process Engineer, a specific pressure gauge reading is definitely an indication that you cannot achieve a particular through-put level. the Operators will tell you, you can and in all the four cases I witnessed, they were right. As Douglass puts it;

Deh naw dey go school, go lear'nam!.      You don't learn such things in school!.

To a large extent, Manwaring & Wood capture its essence as 'tacit skill'. The theoretical and empirical problem in their argument is that it coincides with what Braverman calls 'dexterity', that is acquired within a definite human/machine relationship, dexterity of a kind deriving from a fragmented labour process and tied to a specific point in the commodity production process. Put simply it is tied to the specific job, neither transferable nor of the magnitude that underscores Braverman's comparison of the meaning and content of production process in some pre-capitalist and capitalist labour processes (1974:45-58, ch.20; Marx 1976:283-92). I am doubtful of the viability of Manwaring & Wood's assumption, that the existence of tacit skill refutes the argument that the development of capitalist as a commodity production process fragments the unity of the labour process.<sup>7</sup>

There are however other dimensions, among the Plant Operators, to 'tacit skill'. The human/machine relationship is such that Operators refer to instruments as animate objects and often by the possessive pronoun; 'my heater', 'my compressor'. When you call someone's attention to a tank it is sometimes expressed as 'your tank' people refer to the machines almost as if they are living persons. A typical comment was by PI, an Area 1 pump Operator to Efenaire, the Heaterman;

Efe, your heater dey misbehave, o.      Efe, your heater is misbehaving.

<sup>6</sup> At the end of 1984, Warri Refinery produced 26,041.7 tons of LPG. With FCC down from December 1984, and the accident in Area 1, production of LPG dropped to 2,080 tons. (Nigerian Petroleum News, March 1985, p.3).

<sup>7</sup> To use a personal example, my paternal grandma, who made raffia bags, did not just do the weaving. She prepared the raffia, dyed the strands, created her patterns, weaved, and sowed the final product. That, I believe, is what Braverman meant by unity of conception and execution.



This situation should not be taken as validating Burawoy's category of "consent" , not the least because the concept fails to appreciate the contradiction immanent in a workers's personal identification with his/her location in the production process or the object of production. This identification underscores an autonomous confidence about their capability, vis-a-vis the Engineers, who 'who learnt their "skill" in school' and the capacity to resist. Once when a repair was being carried out on one of the dripping nozzles of the Heater, the Maintenance Supervisor, who felt Efe was disturbing them asked him to "Shurrup and gettaway!" and Efe's response was;

Mak'a commot for where?, for MAI  
Heater?. Who'side?.

What do you mean I should gettaway?,  
from MY Heater?. You can't mean it!.

Later he told me the fellow must be joking to imagine he could come from Maintenance and tell him where to stay or not stay around HIS heater. The intimate knowledge of instruments, expressed in animated idioms, as in Efe's case and many others, feeds into a distinct level of confidence, which as will be demonstrated in later chapters, underwrites union and non-union based demands and actions.

There is however another dimension to the work among the Operators -as is the case with other categories of workers here. In spite of the anger that one found expressed on many areas of work, there is a distinct streak of pride; its expression takes different forms and derive from a number of sources. But the connecting line is that it is a pride expressed in their expenditure of labour-power, very often it is in the knowledge of the complexity of the technology. Kenneth, a Water Treatment Plant Boardman expressed it like this;

All the time you're in school... you're learning chemistry, learning physics, learning biology, all dat na t'eory [it was all theory]. Here you see with your own eyes the practical. This is where you really work on the practical.

Some, in response to the survey question of what they like most about their work said it is the 'technical aspect', 'the practical aspect'. In one instance it flows from the hi-tech nature of the refining technology employed, in another it is the fact that their concerted shopfloor effort forced the pace of the handing over of the operations of the refinery, from the Italian employees of Snamprogetti to them. The 'battle', as is generally



called in the rich shopfloor folklore -relayed by old Operators to newer ones with relish- was because they felt Snamprogetti was prepared to delay the handing over for as long as it could. Against all predictions that the things would fall apart, they have however held the fort and kept it running.<sup>8</sup>

Most significant is the fact that the products of their labour keep the 'wheel of the nation turning', the transport system depends on them, when they go on strike they know the nation grinds to a halt. In addition, the oil sector is still the mainstay of the country's economy, which means them and the products of their labour. There is no doubt that some of this has to do with the specific -historical- situation of Warri Refinery, the high visibility of the results of their expended labour and the fact that NNPC is a public sector concern, but it is nonetheless valid in its general implications for shopfloor relations and work.

At the unit level, workers in each section know how important their labour is to the overall production process. Udofia, the middle-aged Caustic loader, once asked me during an interview;

wetin be di Refinery, if caustic naw dey. If 'e naw dey, NONE OF DEM fit do any work. Sti'yet, deh naw know we.

what is the Refinery, if there's no caustic solution?. Without it, NO UNIT can work. Yet they don't give a damn about us.

It is important to stress, as in other cases of workers' identification with their process of labour, that one cannot read into this pride any notion of unmediated subordination to the employer's identity (cf Wedderburn & Crompton 1972:184) or a 'social integration' (cf Blauner 1964:146-165) or 'voluntary servitude' as Burawoy (1979:81) did. The pride may be complex in its implications, as will be argued in later chapters, but 'voluntary servitude' is not one of them.

### 5.3.3. The Maintenance.

In the Maintenance department, the nature of work, as I hinted above, differs from that of Process Plants and there are wide variations among various sections and units. On the one hand, we have the Workshops and on the other units dealing directly with the

<sup>8</sup> See Ch.4, for my comments on some of the effects of the technical partnership and Chs. 7 & 8 for discussion on the effect on the shopfloor.



Plants, this distinction is particularly evident in Instrument maintenance section. In Fleet maintenance on the other hand it does not hold, since repairs and maintenance jobs are done in the workshop, except when vehicles had to be towed-in. Other sections like Electrical or Mechanical occupy a rough middle ground. For analytical purpose I will be concerned with Instrument and Mechanical Maintenance -especially the Boilermakers unit-sections.

Work in Workshop units is slightly distinct from the rest. Many of the huge equipment require large space for the repair jobs on them to be removed into the workshop. In other instances, when repair work requires the use of instruments which cannot be carried into the Plant, the equipment is brought into the workshop. However, the idea of a rigid distinction between workshop and Plant units all too soon disappear. Many maintenance jobs involve workshop technicians going to the equipment that cannot be dismantled and brought to the workshop. In Instrument for instance, the maintenance of the clocking machines -every other day- involves going to the areas where the machines are installed. On the other hand, 'commissioning' an equipment that has just been repaired -as in the case of the Jetty panel unit for the control and monitoring of product discharge- involves testing the equipment at the point where they are in use. What may remain however is the distinction in what the jobs entail.

Take the Electronics workshop unit of the Instrument Section, for instance: where work mainly involves the repair of electronic circuit cards, the standard uniform is the white overall. The workers here are the closest approximates of the 'hi-tech' workers doing the 'clean-job', normally assumed in process technology areas. There are many hurdles between work allocation (based on the theoretical evaluation of based on the Planning section's Gantt Chart) and completion of the jobs. Sometimes it is a problem of inaccurate evaluation, or the non-availability of or delay in receiving required spare parts from the warehouse. The lack of immediate access to facilities like vehicles or even power can cause delays. Although not typical in all its aspects, the events of 23 October will suffice as an illustration. An Alarm Panel instrument -which warns of equipment malfunction- had been brought into the workshop the previous day for repairs. Planning had assumed 3 man-hours for repairs and commissioning and the job was allocated to Chris, a Polytech-



nic Electronics graduate. It took some time to dismantle and test the various circuit cards. This failed to isolate the malfunctioning section, the next thing was to collect new circuit cards from the warehouse to isolate the faulty card, there was none for some hours. Further tests did not result in the red light on the display section going off when the 'reset' button was pressed and the test continued the following morning. The next alternative was to take the equipment to the 'mother Board' at the Jetty and locate if the fault was outside the circuit boards, which meant the following day.

At 10 o'clock -by which time two people had to work together on it- when the panel had to be taken to the Jetty - over 5.5 kilometers away- there was no spare vehicle. All the 3 vehicles allocated to the 7 units of Instrument were in use elsewhere. We did not get to the Jetty until 1120 hours, but there was no power supply, the power cable to the Jetty had been faulty for some time; meanwhile, a small generating set was being used. The set had to be rested for some hours every time it is used because of the power consumption of the pumps and other equipment. The Jetty chief operator said the best time would be 0800 hours the next morning, this was because the Jetty operators would have to stop loading the ships -some of which had been anchored for two days because of the power supply problem- if the test was to be done. A job with 3 man-hour allocation was dragging into the 3rd day and with more than one person doing the job. As I said it is not typical in all its aspects -this was the case of Murphy's law-, it is however typical in terms of the gap between allocated and job completion time.

Much of this derives from a number of problems, first as the Superintendent explained;

We had to adopt "a philosophy of maintenance by repair". Although you can do maintenance by replacement, because of third world problem, foreign exchange and so on we cannot afford that, so we said the best thing is to do it mostly by repair. But there's a limit.

There is however a more specific problem. As Njoku, the Workshop Supervisor explained, Snamprogetti refused to provide flow circuit diagrams and service manuals (see Ch.4);

when we write the manufacturers, some Japanese, some in Europe or US, when we ask them for the complete flow circuit diagram and service manuals, they will send you the wrong paper. It is not oversight, my brother. They want



you to keep coming back, they prefer to sell to you than help you maintain it. So what we have tried is, small by small, through trial and error, to draw the circuit flow ourselves, but it is not easy. In mechanical if the equipment doesn't work you can go and do it again, in electronics you may not get another chance if it goes wrong.

This is the peripheral capitalist character of the economy having immediate effects on the shopfloor, as I pointed out in Chapters 3 and 4. The frustration from these problems, is sometimes mixed with the heady feeling of triumph when success is achieved, both are integral to the nature of work throughout Maintenance department. Some try to overcome the frustration through mental distancing, as Chris mentioned in the aftermath of the Jetty job;

well you get used to it. If you worry too much about it, you'll just kill yourself. Can you imagine coming all the way and see now, "No light"! If you want to live long, you think less about it, you try to get used to it.

There is the gutsy sensation like the situation among Operators, whenever they crack a difficult job, on the other hand it is simply the daily process of working hi-tech equipment. During my first week in the Electronics workshop, Isaac (a technician), took me round the Power Plant, showing me some of the computer-based machines they maintain and the rest of the area, he asked me, with a touch of sparkle in his eyes;

'What do you think?', 'Fantastic!', I replied and he went on; 'and we maintain that and all the other equipment here, you know'.

He went on to explain 'the magic' of the place, but admitted that when things get serious they still have to bring in the manufacturers; he also explained the danger of electrocution in the work. If the vision of the murky work in Process Plant and other parts of Maintenance is quite distant for the researcher, it was not for Isaac. On our way back, we passed some Mechanical Maintenance workers working on scaffolds very high on the FCC Reactor he said;

you see them?. Our own work is neat, we don't use power. Their own na [is] sheer muscle, our own doesn't require it, but can you imagine someone working like that, eh?. Five years and you say "No promotion". Can you imagine what it means, you sweat, you endanger your life. No appreciation!.

I will return to the issue of empathy among the workers, which Isaac demonstrates here, in Chapter 7. Perhaps an aspect of work that is not glamorous in workshop or other



units of Instrument is the irregular nature of working hours. The peculiar nature of process technology is such that no time could be specified for maintenance jobs. When the malfunction occurs, people are brought in to rectify it and that could be any time of the day or night. Sometimes it could be just around the closing time when an emergency job would be brought in; In such a case those who have to do the job would stay on it until it is completed. As in the case of the Process Plant workers, it is common for people to stay for days until the job is finished -with quick relays for catching a nap or dashing home, which is arranged informally among those on the job.

The idea of Call Duty, for instance, is to facilitate such jobs, because it is organized centrally, the person on Call Duty could be a pneumatic instrument person. When the job to be done is electronics, the person on Call Duty will provide the Shift Supervisor with the names and addresses of people who can do the job and a driver is dispatched to the address. As an Electronics technician puts it;

They will come for you. And when deh [they] come, you mus'to [have to] follow them. That's why they have all our addresses, so they can come for you anytime. They use force on you because deh [they] know you naw fit [can't] refuse. No way, you must follow them. Even if you're going outside (your house), you must tell your wife, so deh [they] know how to find you.

Explaining what he meant by 'force', he said, 'You have no choice, you have to follow them, naw be force be dat?' [isn't that force?]. As another puts it;

They've come to call me like that many times. The last time, na [it was] around 2 in the morning... I felt very bad, but what can you do about it. You can't tell the driver to go and say he didn't see you. Na your gari bi dat [that's your job on the line]. Even if you try sef', deh go sen' anoder one com' carry you [they will send another one to come and collect you]"

There are stories of people 'apprehended' at most inconvenient times. Okocha, the Process Plants Unit Instrument Foreman, was called back from a journey with his family, to his home town; he was going to attend his cousin's wedding but had to come to the Plant. By the time the job was completed in the evening, there was no wedding to attend, but he had dozens of relatives to apologise to. For the Supervisory staff, who live in the housing complex, it is more immediate. I mentioned the prevalence of walkie talkies and the VW Beetle cars earlier in this chapter. If at first glance these seem like symbols of 'power' or 'staff of office', there is also a catch to it. The Supervisors and higher officers



in Instrument maintenance, as well as other units and departments, have a radio receiver fixed to the cars and by their bedsides in the housing complex. All these radio communication units are permanently 'ON', so when you are needed, day or night, you can be reached. Explaining the mixed feelings it involves, one of the Instrument Supervisors said;

Sometimes, you're just going home when you'll be called on the radio, sometimes at night or even weekends, Saturdays and Sundays; anytime there's a problem. Okay it's my work and it's always a personal challenge to beat the problem. I want to work... stick with it until it's solved. But they don't care over there [in Admin Block] they don't want to know.

Asked if it affects his family life, he replied;

Of course, it does, you face the tension and the problems here and then you go back home you face another problem. Many-a-times, my wife has quarreled over it. You know.... she thinks I am playing hanky-panky. And upon all that the people there [in the Admin Block] don't have any respect,... no regard for the work we do here.

The daily monitoring of work in this area is more direct and personal than in the Process Plants, the floor arrangement in Maintenance no doubt has to do with maximum use of space, without getting in the way of equipment and people working, but it goes beyond that. Instrument electronics workshop unit may suffice, for the moment, as an example.

The work benches in the workshop are arranged in four rows. The Foreman's desk across the room backs the glass window. The Superintendent's and Supervisors' offices are across the gangway from them with wide louvre windows which have little to do with fresh air.<sup>9</sup> The layout, as in other sections of Maintenance makes keeping eyes on everything around quite convenient, without the supervising officer having to leave his seat. The Foreman keeps an eye on the technicians, the Supervisor on the Foreman and the rest and the Superintendent on everyone.

### **The Boilermakers.**

The other face of work in the Maintenance department -away from the glamour and neatness of Electronics workshop- is typified by the Boilermakers unit of the Mechanical section. In my first week in Process Plant, I noticed that some of the workers doing a job around the unit were wearing blue boilersuits rather than the green, and I asked my

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<sup>9</sup> All the offices and workshops are air-conditioned.



Area Operator for an explanation. He pointed out that they are Maintenance workers, but that these ones were Boilermakers, he went on to explain;

Boilermaker?, eh, boilermaker?. O'-	Boilermaker?, eh, boilermaker unit?.
men na real hardwork be dat o, naw	Man, that's a place of real hard
be small t'in o.Shu!, and deh dey	work. Gosh!, and the accident rate
wound for der naw small, na no joke.	is terrible, that's a TERRIBLE unit.
BA-A-A-D place be dat o.	

As I discovered it may be as tough as everybody said, but it is a trait shared with the Scaffolding & Insulation unit of Mechanical section. This is where whatever illusions about work in a 'hi-tech' process plant finally disappears and the shock of the grim side of life on the shopfloor comes in full force.

The unit is a 'specialized' arm of Mechanical that repairs and maintains all mechanical equipment in the Complex. The exception being pumps and compressors or the engine and automobile component parts of vehicles which are under the Pump & Compressor unit of Mechanical and Fleet maintenance, respectively. A repair or maintenance job however is multiple in dimension and the Unit works in close collaboration with other units of the Mechanical section. These are mainly, Welding & Fabrication -which produces tools or parts for use in repair jobs-, Scaffolding & Insulation -which erects scaffolds and handles the lagging of process lines and columns-, and Toolmaking -which stores and allocates tools. The Boilermaker Unit is under a Supervisor who controls three Foremen. Here, unlike Instrument, the boundary is largely non-existent, although work is allocated along the lines of the Foreman's crew. The fluidity is generally because quite often major repair or maintenance jobs require a large number of people. On smaller jobs however, the allocation from Planning, is handed to each Foreman, who each morning (in areas where there are no continuation jobs to do) allot the jobs to 'work gang(s)' of one or more persons; the size of the work gang depends on the nature of the job to be done.

The work ranges from repairs on the FCC Reactor, to the Power Plant turbines or the small mechanical wheels for operating the water canon valves of the Fire engines; this means working in virtually any section of the Complex. Where the job does not entail the presence of a Foreman or other supervisory personnel, the leader of the work gang is responsible for directing the job, this is usually one of the more experienced Boilermakers. On the other hand, some jobs have to be done in the workshop which means very of-



ten the presence of the supervisory personnel even when they are not working directly on the job. The work here is basically manual, as far away from 'intellectualized' labour as can be imagined. It ranges from working under the searing heat of the turbine room of the power plant to the extremely manual work of dismantling huge Heat Exchangers, Valve Plugs and coupling them back after repairs, doing repair work inside columns and reactors, in areas of total darkness. In the latter instance, the job is done from dangling rope ladders. You not only have to contend with catalyst powders but the fear of falling off. One of the workers, Odogu, described the experience of working inside the reactor;

Di time wey we go work inside di, right inside o, na so di t'ing dey fall for our head. When you touch anything na so e go fall; 'Whii', all over our head. Na only God know di t'ing wey deh take make 'am. We-der som' five years now man go begin get all kin' disease, man naw know. But wetin you go do. Try say you no'o do am, na go be dat.

When we had to work inside it deep inside, it was falling all over us. If you touch any part of it, it will fall all over you in showers. Only God knows the chemical content. Maybe in some five years one would end up with all sorts diseases, I don't know. But what can you do. Try telling them you won't do it, you'll be out on your ears.

He resorted to wearing a balaclava when working in such areas. They are not provided with Gas Masks because such jobs are not reckoned to be in high risk areas. In other areas -like the fractionating columns-, heat and dirt, not catalyst, may be the problems. As one of the older workers, Pappy, described it;

Some place go small so you no'o fit turn at all. 'E naw even big reach make you turn ya body. You go move like dis you go turn like dat, eh!, you no'o fit turn. You go look up, look down, you dey for middle. Di t'ing far up, 'e far for down. Dat time my broder, you go tire for dis kin' work. Dat time all kin' t'ing don pour for your body well, well; dust o, soot o; all di dirty wey dey, you don take your body carry am. Sometime you go reach place where air naw dey at all. To breath se'f na wahala. All di body go dey hot, you go dey sweat. Wetin you go do. Naw work?. Na ya gari you wan t'row'way so.

Some sections are so small you can't even turn at all. Not even big enough for you to shift your body. You try turning this or that way; you can't. You look up and down, it's a long way in either direction, and you are somewhere in the middle. That's when you really get tired of this kind of work. By you've been covered in all sorts of things: dust, soot, the dirt would be all over you. Sometimes you get to sections where the air is really thin. Breathing becomes very difficult. You're feeling hot all over, sweating. But what can can you do. You, won't work?. Well that's putting your livelihood on the line.

If you have no head for heights, you probably have to find one, because the danger of the work is something all the workers said you have to live with. Because of the nature



of the work, Maintenance workers, perhaps more than any, have a reputation for physical accidents [see next section].

Even apparently uncomplicated jobs like unblocking the Vapour vent line at the top of the FCC Reactor, could turn out to be a protracted and agonizing job. The job, given the small work gang with which I worked, was to remove the coke deposit inside the vent line. We only realised what we were in for when we got there and realised the coke would not give way to ordinarily hitting it with a pipe. Since we had to work from the top of the vent (about 10 centimeters in diameter) we could not use a chisel and neither could we go back to the workshop and tell the Foreman the coke would not give in. One hour of working on it, in relay, over 70 meters from the ground, under the blazing sun, burning biceps and shoulder muscles, some of us new on the job collected some blisters; even with the work-gloves on.

The situation is made more severe because of the persistent pressure from Supervisors and above. It is difficult to stand around in the Boilermakers' workshop, even when you are trying to collect tools for a job without questions being asked; little wonder then that people prefer jobs in the Plant, to workshop jobs. Gladys, a female worker in the unit, explained;

Its good sha\*, at least you no'o [won't] get them breathing down your neck. That's why when you're doing this kind of work; hard dirty ones in the plant, you don't mind. If you finish or you're having problems like this, don't go to the workshop; even if you finish before break. After all the energy you put in here, once they see you in the workshop they'll have something to say 'What are you doing around?', 'Don't you have any work to do?', 'You're loitering around' and so on. They don't give a damn about what you've gone through. So you learn to devise your own method of surviving. Give yourself a break, find somewhere nice and take a rest, when its about break time, go and tell them you've finished or you're having some problem. At least they won't give you another work until after break. When you see the old hands at it, you'll understand. All the ogas [bosses], they talk sometimes just because they have to talk. If you're working in the workshop and they're there, you're in trouble; every little thing, they'll have something to say. 'What do you think you're doing?', 'Do this, do that'. You can't have a minute to yourself, without complaints from them. [\*'sha' is an expression of emphasis]

Both the nature of the work and of the monitoring of labour-power expenditure (cf Gallie 1978:82-3) generate an intense undercurrent of resentment here, more powerful



than in many other sections of the refinery. One of the units' more elderly workers, Ufoma, puts it this way;<sup>10</sup>

They treat you as if you're nothing... to them you're just a piece of equipment another tool, something to be used.

Naw be tools deh say dey wear out?, for here na human being dey wear out. You know our people dey talk one t'ing, deh say 'Farmer wey dey take fire wood, carry fire dey go farm, na where 'e burn finish, na 'im 'e go t'row'way 'am for bush.

Aren't tools you'd expect to wear out?, here its human beings that wear out. You know our people have an adage; 'When a Farmer uses firewood to convey fire to the farm, it's at the point where the firewood burns out that he'll throw it into the bush.

They want to work you until you die, after that, they'll just get another person to do your work.

Wetin?, naw be say make you do di one wey you fit do, allow dem worry for di rest?.

What the hell!, do what you can and leave them to worry about the rest.

This is not just a sentiment of shopfloor or non-supervisory workers alone. There were three Foremen in the place where the collective interview was done and one of them expressed a very prevalent opinion this way;

you'o fin' most of the workers dey dodge di work small small. If you put head for di work like dat, you go just die for not'ing.

you'll find most of the workers take it easy on the job. If you drive yourself too hard, you just kill yourself, for no decent reason."

Here as in many areas of work in the Refinery the issue of accident feature prominently. It is difficult to imagine the work across board without the physical and non physical hazards it involves.

#### 5.3.4. The Office-Process Work.

To step out of the Plant, into the Administrative Block, reveals a distinct work environment. In most of the offices, not only is the work environment cleaner but the urgency and pressure of work in the Plant seem very far away. For most of the workers here, the regular nature of work reflects the relative comfort of the office accommodation. As in Maintenance, supervision is more personal but it does not carry with it the intense tension this generates in the Plant.

<sup>10</sup> As in many cases Ufoma was shifting between pidgin and ordinary English. The statement is a continuous one, and my separation of it is only to ease the reading difficult of having large chunk of normal English in pidgin statement.



However, the specific nature of work differs from one group to another. The pressures, when they do arise, are therefore of significantly different kinds. At one extreme are the Cleaning workers whose work may not have the peculiar anxieties and susceptibility to accidents though the work carries its own burden. Cleaning job is perhaps one of the jobs with lowest esteem, and the cleaners are people with Primary or lower formal education. The work involves cleaning of offices, toilets, the inside of the Administrative Block and other buildings. The problem for the cleaners, has to do with overwork, especially since the freezing of employment into this job grade in 1984. On the other hand, one can take the clerical work and other 'white collar' jobs which possess all the supposed glamour of oil sector employment, with a limited amount of the more grim side of working in the industry.

For the workers in Falomo the work environment is also more relaxed than the situation in the Plant. However, getting to the workplace in the Lagos, is as integral to nature of work as the office itself. Although Lagos refers to the island itself, the urban growth has swamped most of the neighbouring towns; in real terms therefore 'Lagos' refers to areas sometimes as far as 30 kilometers from the island. Most of the workers live on the outskirts of the city and quite a proportion live in the largely urban poor residential areas like Agege, Ajegunle and Maroko. While Agege and Ajegunle are between 20 and 10 kilometers away, Maroko is a short distance from Falomo; across the lagoon from, arguably the most expensive residential part of Ikoyi.

For those living on the outskirts, getting to work -even with the NNPC staff transport system- could mean leaving home by 0500 or 0530, to avoid the infamous traffic congestion of Lagos; the buses depart from their terminals in the town by 0600 for the same reason. Many of those who are not on the bus route, and have to leave home early, may find themselves getting to the work premises within an hour and then have to wait for the official resumption of work at 0730. Many of these workers may not get back to their home till 1800 or 1900. Even leaving work with the buses does not mean one can avoid the traffic congestion; many who live far from the bus terminal will still have to join Lagos's public transport, to get home. As someone remarked;



all I know is I give 12 hours to NNPC, I leave home before six and I don't get back until quarter to six in the evening. I share my waking hours with NNPC.

Unlike many other employees at Falomo, he has a car, but like most, he sees the ordeal of getting to the workplace as part of the work itself. The contrast between Management staff and other workers, could not be more distinct; the former live in the adjoining residential areas of Victoria Island and Ikoyi, hence getting to work is in a matter of minutes. Going home during the lunch break to freshen up is easy and quite a common practice, but for most workers who live in the outskirts, this is not possible. These different experiences have significant implications for work relations and struggles which will be demonstrated in the later chapters. So also is the state of the office accommodation in Lagos, which is vital to the way in which work is 'experienced'.

#### 5.3.5. Shift Work.

The discussion of Shift Work is being undertaken separately because of what I consider to be its distinct nature and implications. Furthermore, since different sections of the workforce work shift, its discussion does not sit easily with the discussion of work in different work processes which I have undertaken so far. As I earlier noted, in most areas of the Refinery, work is organized along shift lines. The Production, Power Plant and Fire sections of the Refining division, and the Security department, are however peculiar in that they also work Night Shifts. The short discussion here will however concentrate on the Process Area workers.

At any given time there are four shift crews, while 3 crews are working, one would be on 'Rest' period. The 3 working crews are organized into three shift periods; Morning shift, from 0700 to 1400; the Afternoon, from 1400 to 2200 and the Night Shift, from 2200 to 0700. In the Process Plants therefore, there are always at least 4 of each sets of Chief Operators, Boardmen, etc. Table 5.1 below gives a hypothetical shift cycle;<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Appendix G is the Shift Roster of Area 1 for 1985. A=Afternoon, M=Morning, N=Night & R=Rest, in both the Shift Roster and Table 5.1.



TABLE 5.1. SHIFT CYCLE.

MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
A	A	A	A	R	M	M	M	M	N	N	N	N
SUN	MON	TUE	WED									
R	R	R	A									

The morning shift does not seem to be too distinct from the normal working day of Administrative workers for instance and may even have an advantage. The shift worker get to work 30 minutes before them and closes at 1400, 2 hours before them, the distinction however starts with the Afternoon shift. The shift worker is probably still sleeping when everyone is going to work, and at work when others are returning home. For with families, the children could be off to school before they wake up and could be asleep when they return home between 2215 and 2300, though it may have its advantages in other situations, they get to do things during the morning and the afternoon. Night shift is strenuous both physically and emotionally but for those who have to live with it though, the distinction of advantages and disadvantages may not be so clear. As one shift worker in the Control Room puts it;

Shift work is a bad thing, you get out of touch with the normal rhythm of life, out of touch with everything. Especially when you're on night shift. You can't say because you have the whole day ahead of you, you'll start strutting around. You can't cheat nature, no way. Somewhere along the line you will pay for it, either through illness or other thing. You have to cut yourself off from everybody, spend your day collecting back your energy for the next work. Period!.

The problem as most shift workers would explain is, you cannot keep any appointment that does not fall on your rest days and since this could be right in the middle of the week rather than weekends when most gatherings take place, you tend to "become an outcast", as shift workers emphasized over and over. They find it difficult to even keep in touch with relatives or attend major family gatherings or do things other people take for granted. The christmas of 1985, as Ekhaton, the Area Operator, points out was the first in four years that coincided with their rest period. For workers in other shifts, the criteria of (process) commodity production, had no respect for their desires. As a Chief Operator puts it;



Even if the General Manager dies, production has continue. The day this man (the head of production) collapsed in the office, did anyone because of that stop work.

The first night of a Night shift period, is probably the only one that does not seem to carry torture with it; people are usually still feeling fresh after the rest period, but by the second night, the pressure will start to show. The last two nights are perhaps period of sheer pain for most people on shift, the toughest period being the middle of the night. In a large control room like the MCR, surviving the night is a collective effort, either with endless discussions (from politics to marriage counselling) or the usual amateur comedians in concert or by playing Connect Four on graph papers. Many times it is music that livens up MCR. These are, of course, from the of Management's perspective, 'illegal' activities. But the character of it all is hardly lost to everyone;

See o, ol' boy, because of naira,  
our bed dey cold for house, we, we  
dey here dey put eye for panel. Mos-  
quitoes, cockroaches, all of dem don  
take over di house.

See, because we have to earn a liv-  
ing, our beds are getting cold in  
the house, and we are here, eyeball-  
ing the panels. Mosquitoes, cockroa-  
ches have taken over the house.

Willie, the adjoining Boardman said;

Ojay, di house sef dey get cold, na  
wah, an' all because make man see  
food chop.

Ojay, even the house is getting  
cold, for goodness sake, and all be-  
cause of survival.

The problem of falling asleep on the night shift does not just arise from wandering around the town when they ought to be recovering from the previous nights. For those who live in the heavily populated residential areas, trying to sleep while other people are having normal day activities is extremely difficult. For those with a family, it could be almost a 'period of war' with the family because as a Chief Operator puts it, every other member of the family had to keep quiet. During the school year, the pressure might be reduced, but during holiday periods the pressure on the whole family could be severe. Where for one reason or another, the Operator's relief person on the following shift is unable to attend work, the Operator would usually continue into the next shift. In the case of those on night shift, the practice is that if their morning shift relief does not show up, another person on another shift or on rest period would be re-called to take over. As in Ojay's case, in September when his relief man could not come to work (because the latter



lost a child the previous evening), Ojay had to cover the morning shift. For both the person dragged in to fill-in for an absent colleague or the person who has to work double-shift, it could be a painful experience. Both, especially the person on rest period, would suddenly find their plans thrown off-course: the criterion of production reigns supreme!.

These are aspects of the tyranny of shift work which do not get into one's performance records. Most shift workers are not just at work for 8 or 10 hours, their 24 hours of living, their relations within the families, relatives and neighbours is constantly determined by their work. Work acquires a distinct domineering status which they have to carry around with them all the time. The dictates of commodity production suck in both the worker and every relation they are involved in. On the other hand, the membership of a shift crew is usually permanent and while interaction between members of different shift crews may be limited, the bond within a crew is usually very strong -perhaps because of the effects of shift work.

#### 5.3.6. The Nature of Work: a survey report.

The discussion of the nature of work so far has depended on largely ethnographic reports, which is perhaps easier to deal with given the organization of the discussion around the forms of labour process. However, some of the issues of work treated so far, cut across the different forms of organizing labour activities, and were raised in the survey. I will touch here on three of them, viz. (i) opportunity in work for initiative or to exercise one's judgment, (ii) freedom to choose one's method of work, and finally, (iii) the challenge offered by the job.

The question of the discretionary power that process work offers is one that has been raised in the literature (Blauner 1964, Mallet 1969), and was also raised in the survey [see Appendix A(i), Q.19(1)], and Table 5.2 below shows the distribution pattern, based on types of work.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> I have collapsed 'Little' and 'Very Little' under Little, and 'Much' and 'Very Much' under Much



Table 5.2.  
Opportunity in Work For Initiative. (%).

Job Description	NONE	LITTLE	MODERATE	MUCH	MAXIMUM	Row %
Operator	16.7	35.0	25.0	23.3	0.0	24.9
Technician	9.2	18.5	36.9	26.2	9.2	27.0
Technologist/ Engineer	7.1	21.4	46.4	25.0	0.0	11.6
Firemen	23.1	30.8	30.8	15.4	0.0	5.4
Others	8.0	24.0	34.7	30.7	2.7	31.1
Column %	11.2	25.3	34.0	26.1	3.3	N=241

I have used the job description pattern in order to highlight the type of job done. Those classified as 'Others' are mainly Administrative workers, though the distribution pattern does not show any statistical significance<sup>13</sup>, it is important to note that 51.7% of the Operators (Process workers) indicate little or no opportunity for personal initiative in the job. This is against 27.7% of the respondents who are Maintenance workers (Technicians), but even here, only those feeling they have significant opportunity for initiative amount to just over a third of the respondents. Among Engineers and Technologists, mainly University and Polytechnic graduates working on the shopfloor in Production or Maintenance, the distribution above may conceal the difference across work processes. In Production area, for instance, 62.5% of this group of workers feel their work offers little or no opportunity for initiative, this is against only 21.4% in Maintenance.

As could be expected when the question on freedom to choose method of work was put to the respondents, 68.3% of the Operators feel they have little or none, so did 40.9% of Maintenance technicians and 64.3% of the Firemen. The distribution among the Technologists and Engineers was by contrast fairly even 32.1% indicated little or no freedom to choose method of work, 28.6% said the freedom is moderately available while 39.3% say they have much or 'maximum' opportunity; however when the specific labour process is introduced, the picture alters. In Production for instance, 62.5% of this group say they have little or no freedom to choose their method of work, which seems obvious. This is against 21.6% in Maintenance where 57% say they have significant (much or maximum) freedom to choose how they work. Against the background of the discussion in the pre-

<sup>13</sup>  $\chi^2=27.6$ , sig. at 0.011, although the Contingency Coefficient is 0.29.



ceding section, these survey findings would seem to support the ethnographic findings. However both go against the grain of conception of the level of discretion that is supposed to be available to process workers as in the works of Blauner and Mallet for instance (cf. Gallie 1978, Nichols & Beynon 1977). Clearly one has to take with scepticism Mallet's (1969:125-129) and Blauner's (1964:132-4) notion of the level of discretion that a Plant or Control Room Operator can exercise, at least in this particular refinery, because the capacity to tinker with dials or valves does not necessarily suggest discretionary power over production. The issue however transcends the process areas.

However the limited discretion that the organization of production offers workers, especially process workers, cannot be read into the challenge that the work offers, as evident in Table 5.3, below.

Table 5.3.  
Challenge Offered By Job. (%)

Job Description	NONE	LITTLE	MODERATE	MUCH	MAXIMUM	Row %
Operator	8.5	15.3	15.3	54.2	6.8	24.5
Technician	0.0	25.0	10.9	53.1	10.9	26.6
Technologist/ Engineer	0.0	14.3	17.9	64.3	3.6	11.6
Firemen	7.1	0.0	21.4	50.0	21.4	5.8
Others	10.5	14.5	11.8	55.3	7.9	31.5
Column %	5.8	16.6	13.7	55.2	8.7	N=241

Burawoy's (1979) discussion of work within 'Allied', shows, as is apparent here, that in spite of the rigid specification of labour activity, people may find the work engaging without challenging the rigidity. Earlier, I also note the active engagement with labour performance among the workers across types of labour process, though the distribution pattern above conceals another picture. For instance, when controlled for the respondent's position in the pay and career ladder (see Ch.6), 29.3% of Operators, who are 'Junior staff' members say the work offers them little or no challenge, which is against 11.1% of the 'Senior staff' workers in the same group. In Maintenance, 36.7% of junior staff technicians voice similar opinion, against 12.1% of senior staff technicians. However, one should still stress that 58.4% of all the junior staff respondents, and 71% of senior staff respondents find their work challenging. In a sense, the margin of opportunity



for initiative or ability to choose one's method of work does not necessarily seem to prevent active engagement in production or the challenge that workers feel it offers them. This discussion will be picked up in the following chapters.

#### 5.4. Accidents and The Hazards of Work.

In this section, I will concentrate on the issues of accidents and work hazards. I have separated this discussion from the rest on the nature of work because of what I consider the major significance of the physical hazards of work. While Gallie (1978:81) notes the 'positively painful' noise level in the refineries he studied, he did not explore its implications or the wider dimension of work hazard; Blauner (1964) also no attention to this aspect of process work.

When people start working in the plant they are given boilersuits, safety boots and hat. All around the plant, there are safety signs emphasizing compliance with safety regulations: the wearing of safety hats and boots in all areas, ear-muffs in others and the strict no-smoking rules, etc. In the clinic there is a Ministry of Health illustrated sign warning about ear muffs and hearing disability. If one also compares the accidents rate in Warri Refinery with the Delta Steel plant across the town from the refinery, the image of the refinery as safety-conscious remains consistent. Against Delta Steel's recorded accidents of 525, 394 for 1982 and 1983, and 185 for the first half of 1984, the Refinery had only 23, 20 and 29 reported cases of accidents for 1982, 1983 and the whole of 1984, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

Yet it is difficult to imagine the work without the serious problem of safety and health hazard. The figures cited above also refers to reported physical injuries, which hardly conveys the depth or the nature of physical accidents and injuries. What strikes me about this type of accidents is the freak nature and pattern of their occurrence. A sharp response of Mark, a Chief Operator in Area 1 to the presence of a Safety Inspector, sums it up;

Its okay for you people to sit over there and talk about safety.... those boys [i.e plant operators] work daily under tension. Nobody, not one of us know which pump or valve will give way or when.

<sup>14</sup> The Delta Steel has a workforce of over 5,000 against the Refinery's over 1,500.



Physical injuries range from minor bruises to severe burns from products -with temperature of over 300 degrees celsius- splashing on someone trying to unblock a valve or a vent. In many instances this could be only on a minor part of the body, but in some cases like Amrede, an Area 1 Operator, it could be a serious burn. As one of his work-mates described the incident, -an attempt to unblock a line;

Deh try open di t'ing, 'e naw open.  
After son'time di Supervisor say may  
deh try take stick shook di line,  
two times di t'in naw work. Na'im 'e  
com' take power shook di t'in. O'men  
na bad t'in! Hot crude jus' blow co-  
mmot for di line. Di t'in scatter  
for all 'im body, di leg, efrywhere.  
Di boy ru-u-n-n, 'e sh-a-a-u-t. 'E  
run naw bi small 'im glasses don  
melt. When deh commot 'im trousers,  
'e jus' peel 'im skin.

They tried to open it, but it won't.  
After sometime, the Supervisor said  
they should use a stick to unblock  
the line. After trying twice without  
success, he rammed the stick in with  
great force. It was horrible, mate!.  
Hot crude just blew out of the line.  
Splashed all over him; his body, his  
legs, everywhere. The boy ra-a-n, he  
scr-e-e-amed. It was no joke; his  
glasses had melted. When they tried  
taking off his trousers, his skin  
peeled off.

For the lucky ones, it could be cold burns from LPG or Naphtha. 'Minor' physical accidents may be more prevalent, the problem of who would be the next person in a serious accident remain. In terms of the overall picture, the Maintenance and Production workers carry the burden of accidents and the uncertainty of their occurrence. In 1983 for instance, 18 of the recorded 20 accidents happened to Process Plant and Maintenance workers; in 1984, it was 25 of the 29 recorded cases. Because of the varied nature of maintenance work, they are in fact more susceptible to the whole range of accidents; from hot product or acid splash to breaking legs or falling from some heights. Numa, a Boilermaker, in January 1984, fell into the steam well behind the Maintenance premises in the process of manually moving a steel container with five other workers and a Supervisor. It was after the incident, which left him badly burnt from the waist down, that a mesh cover was provided for the steam well but Numa spent over 12 months in the hospital. Even after 11 months of leaving the hospital, there are numerous sore patches all over his lower body. As he puts it;



Any time when 'a stan' for long, di legs go dey hot well well, 'e go dey scratch. Even as 'a dey talk now 'e dey scratch, and if a scratch 'am so 'e go dey peel, das why a get all di sore for bodi like dis. My broder, you know say when 'a return na Boilermaker deh sen' me com' again.

Any time I stand for a long time, my legs will be hurting badly, it itches also. Even now, as I'm talking, it's itching, and if I scratch it, the skin peels, that's why I have sores all over. You know, mate, when I returned from hospital, I was sent back to the Boilermakers unit.

There are other dimensions to work hazard in a petro-chemical plant that conceals the focus on physical injuries, this includes noise pollution. For Operators and Maintenance workers who work in the Process Plant and Power Plant areas, noise pollution is part of the reality of their work. Although the noise level varies from one area to the other, as an internal Safety department noise survey of February 1984 shows, no area in the survey measured below 90dB. The Pump station in Pump House E, for instance measured 99dB. Taking 80dB as the safe limit (Kinnersley 1973), the difference in an areas which registers 90dB is not just 10 units, 80dB is 'one tenth' as harmful as' 90db (ibid, p.57). Workers in the Pump House E, for instance, are subjected to a noise level, 90 times more harmful than 80dB. Even so, as the Safety department comment at the end of the paper reveals, the noise levels in all these areas increase with time and the 'debilitating noise' (p.2), would have increased. I know from my limited experience of working in the Topping section of Area 1, for instance, that the Heater Areas (the section under the Fans area) are not as noisy as the pump areas. The only way you could communicate with anyone more than six inches from your lips is by shouting your lungs out. Except for the Operators working around the compressors stations in Areas 2 and 3, Operators and Maintenance workers working in the other areas, are not provided ear-muffs. Ekhemelum, one of my work mates in Boilermakers, succeeded in getting one, only after he pressured a medical doctor in the clinic to make a case for him to wear ear-muffs. Supply of ear-muffs is not automatic, even among those officially recognised as working in high noise pollution areas.

For most of the workers, the problem of noise hazard is not a simple question of discomfort. As Willie, a Boardman, points out during a group interview;

It's not just that, the noise affect you behaviour too... He [i.e Ugbebor] didn't use to talk like this when he first arrived, and the same with me. This is not my normal voice, my voice is twice as high, now as it used to



be. Even outside you still talk loud, it can be embarrassing. Before you know it, you're almost shouting.

Ugbebor, a Plant Operator also noted that;

it affects people psychologically too, when you're in the plant you tend to be quite forgetful...[pause] it's almost like the noise blocks a part of your memory off... and when you're coming out of the areas with high level of noise, you tend to get edgy... sort of,... overreact to situations, its terrible.

There are some like Ovie, a process engineer, who said 'we're used to it'. What may be the symptom of partial deafness was described thus; 'the pain [in the ear] wears out after some time, although sometimes... the noise subsides and then it takes off'. The device which some workers use is plugging their ears with balls of tissue paper.

More sinister than physical accidents and noise, perhaps, is the chemical/gas emission in the plant, not the least because, in the absence of thorough medical check-up, a direct connection between chemical pollution and health disabilities could not be if the workers wanted to take action against the Management. The daily experience in the plant is however real, rather than just one or two gases, what we had to contend with was a cocktail of gases and chemicals, from highly toxic chemicals like Tetraethyl Lead to Ammonia. In some areas of the Plant, between the Gas plant and the Vacuum unit for instance, breathing becomes quite difficult. Avoiding the massive presence of gas in the air requires holding your breath around there or covering the nose with pieces of clothes. For the Operators who work in such units, there is no escape: you can hardly hold your breath for eight hours a day, five days a week. When I inquired about a particularly offensive odour, Braimah, one of my co-workers, replied;

Dat na [that's] flue gas... [long pause] this is the kind of thing we face everyday. When we tell the 'big men'[management]... the people who never have to sit here for every minute of the day, they say we're exaggerating the claim say di work dey [that the work is] hazardous.

In this specific case, the flue gas (spent gas from combustion of fuel) simply goes through the stack and then settles on the surrounding area. In most other instances, the gases leak out at the points where the lines are joined.

There is virtually no section of the Plants where direct contact with gases and chemicals, of one sort or another, does not exist. During a collective interview with plant



Operators, the most common health complaints were 'catarrh', 'blockage of nostril', 'sore throat' and 'chest pain', this is not a fluke finding of an empathic ethnography. The Refinery medical records of complaints in the clinic, shows that ailments related to the 'thoracic girdle' -which is the breathing system- feature prominently. As a percentage of all complaints -in a randomly selected monthly records-, thoracic girdle complaints were 86.3% in September 1981, 60.8% in August 1982, 69.7% in February 1983, 86.4% in October 1984, and 71.8% in August 1985.

The level of awareness about work hazard is also quite high among the workers. In a survey question, for instance, 97.2% of the respondents from Production, 88.3% in Maintenance and 94.4% in Fire & Safety departments say they confront work hazards in their jobs. Even in non-operational areas like Administration, Finance and the Auxiliary units, the figures were 60%, 50% and 64%, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Among those who said they face work hazard, 96% of the Operators name fire, explosion and chemical hazard as the main types they face. 75% of Technicians, 76% of Technologists and Engineers, all the Firemen and 57.1% of those classified as 'Others' say they face similar work hazards.

Chemical hazard, for instance, is indeed not limited to those working within the Plant. There were times when, before one got into the Refinery premises, the odour of released gas would fill the air. A number of the clerical workers who work in the reproduction room of the Technical Services department, have to contend with persistent ammonia vapour. As one of the Operators put it;

We know say we dey die small small,  
but, bo' wetin we go do...Deh naw  
value our lives here.

We know we're dying gradually, but  
what can you do about it... Our  
lives have no value to them.

## Conclusion.

In conclusion it is important to reflect on some of the issues raised so far. Earlier I highlighted a few theoretical issues and it is important to return to them. Most contributions to the LPD, as I indicated in Chapter 2 locate their analyses around the categories of 'control', 'consent', and so on. The category of 'control', for instance, makes absolute

<sup>15</sup> The Correlation Coefficient of the responses to the two questions on work hazard is .64, which shows a consistent response pattern (N=236). The two questions are separated by 33 other ones.



what is essentially an indeterminate factor in the labour process. If we take the concept of 'technical control' of Edwards in the light of the Warri Refinery experience, its contradictory character and indeterminacy becomes evident. Whereas the panel board may pace the work of the Boardman or the equipment within the Plant; that of the Operator may not be know if the plant is working well because the Operator is working or because the Plant is working smoothly on its own. 'Technical control' does not guarantee therefore that the worker is even at the work point. Similarly, clock-in machines may punch the time the attendance card was slotted into it, but does not guarantee that it is the owner of the card who is punching in. For that you need to have security personnel watching every worker clocking-in, but you also have to guarantee that the security personnel do not redefine their relationship with other workers as between 'human beings' and not just as objects of surveillance. The same can be said for 'bureaucratic' control mechanisms; the insistence on the procedure for maintenance jobs for instance, can become self-defeating in times of emergency. So far I have used the category of 'monitoring' labour expenditure, not only reflecting its indeterminacy, but also its contradictory character.

The category of 'consent' should also be treated with caution. I believe it is Burawoy's failure to first situate his analysis of Allied workers, within Marx's work - autonomous of bourgeois sociology- that led him to discard the patterns of activities he witnessed as 'consent'. The capitalist labour process may be, primarily about commodity production, but like any other labour process, it involves concrete labour activity; for the workers, the labour process involves them in purposeful, creative activity. Its specific crystallization in shopfloor idiom could be in the fact that the product of their expended labour-power is central to the economy: it powers the cars and the aircraft, and provides the kerosene for the lanterns at home. In their various units, they keep the Plant running, the gist of this is that their labour is a definitive creative process. The concept of the duality of labour, in Marx, captures these processes, but Burawoy fails to discern the concrete-labour dimension of the duality of the capitalist labour process. The category of 'consent' also fails to recognise the contradictory nature of workers' active engagement in production.

While Manwaring & Wood (1985) concept of 'tacit consent' appreciates the purposeful dimension of labour activities, it does so in one-sided neglect of the contradiction inherent in the duality of the capitalist labour process itself. In other words, the workers appear in production, primarily as bearers of labour-power; their need for creation is incidental, and not the purpose of production. It is therefore important to understand the extent to which commodity production not only dictates work performance and relations at work, but also the lives of the workers outside the workplace. The tyrannical aspect of work is not something that capitalism left behind with the 19th century. In the same vein, the 'social integration' of workers with their employers, which Blauner (1964) -in functionalist style- reads into stable, well paid job, also faces serious challenge within the context of this study. Edwards (1979), Friedman (1977) and Burawoy (1979), even when presenting their arguments with different veneers, share Blauner's functionalist reading of these types of jobs. This issue will be discussed further in the remaining chapters.



## Chapter 6.

## THE INTERNAL LABOUR MARKET.

## Introduction.

In this chapter, I will examine four main issues that are usually taken as elements of the 'Internal Labour Market' (ILM), viz., the recruitment procedure and the training of the workers. This is discussed in section two. Second, I will examine, in section three, the nature 'pay and conditions' (PAC) in NNPC. The third issue, also examined in section three, is the career structure (and development) of the different categories of employees in the corporation. In the final section, I look at the fourth issue which has been raised in the recent ILM literature, viz., the direction of labour activity and the discipline of the workers. The aspect on the direction of labour flows from the earlier discussion in Chapter 5. The chapter, however, starts with a biographical discussion of the attraction of the Refinery, in the first instance, to a selected group of workers. This puts the subsequent discussion against the background of the wider 'labour market' situation in Nigeria.

In conceptual terms, I raise queries about the marginalist undertone of most ILM analyses which look at PAC largely in terms of labour market competition and fail, for instance, to ask questions about the magnitude of social surplus appropriated by the 'top management'. As I will argue, one cannot reduce the mode of distributional relations to the single unit of capital under investigation. First, the distributional aspect of the relations of production must be put in the context of the social formation. Second, the character of the ILM in NNPC does not derive only from nature of public sector employment, in Nigeria (founded on the colonial capitalist bureaucracy) or Union pressures for better PAC. The ILM in NNPC reflects the contradictory location of the corporations as a public sector concern and an oil industry enterprise.

Third, I argue that the exchange-value of labour-power is not judged, from the worker's perspective, in terms of simple reproduction but the extent to which the worker's earnings allow him/her to adequately meet his/her social obligations. However in

a peripheral capitalist context, the extent to which the non-capitalist modes supplement the reproduction of labour-power is significant.

Finally, in reassessing the ILM literature, it is important to reiterate that what the worker sells is labour-power -a potential or capacity to produce-, not labour -the actualization of that potential in production; this process of actual productive consumption of labour-power is important. The enforcement of discipline and the supervisory direction of work discussed in section four, are vital for production. I examine the viability of assuming a distinction between the arbitrariness of 'simple control' and the non-arbitrary 'bureaucratic control' in Edwards' (1975, 1979) work.

### 6.1. In Search of an Eldorado.

The land reclamation which marked the beginning of the construction of the Refinery is symbolic in many ways. The Refinery is the first major 'factory' in the vicinity of Warri. Apart from public sector employment in the area, (in the local government authorities or the Port) wage-employment was largely seasonal or unstable; the archetype of 'secondary labour market'. Such jobs were mainly in the service sector of the oil industry. The construction of the Refinery and its commissioning in 1978 marked a new phase, the expansion of the 'primary labour market'. Many of the workers who joined the Refinery did so for a variety of reasons, and a 'collective biography' will illustrate this.

Some of the first group of workers in the Refinery were like Geepe, the 28 year-old Area 1 Plant Operator. A 'local' lad, he schooled in the rural area around Warri and had lived all along, with his parents. In 1975, he finished his secondary education and his job as a construction worker with one of the firms involved in building the Refinery, was his first experience of wage-employment. The job was on a weekly basis, and when the construction work ended, so did the job. As he puts it



After di work com' finish now, wetin man go do? Na to go dey look for another one, but none of dem be better work. You go work small time for dis one, after son'time deh go say work don finish, for dat one na di same 'tory. A do dat like say more dan one year, na'im 'a com' hear say Refinery dey employ people, na'im a follo' com'. Na since dat time a dey here.

After the job ends, what do you do?. Well, I started looking for another one, but they weren't nice jobs, really. You work with this firm for some time, before you know it, they will say 'no more work'. It was the same story with all of them. I did that, say, for over a year. Then I heard the Refinery was recruiting people, so I came along. I have been here since.

A number of my co-workers in Maintenance and in the Process Plants went through these stages -of first being employed on the construction project- before getting full-time employment in the plant. For many of the workers, even those who worked on the construction project, the refinery is not their first experience of wage employment. Efe, an Area 1 Heater Operator, was in the Army during the Nigerian civil war, he was demobilized in 1971. Between 1971 and 1978, when he came into the Refinery, he had worked in one job or the other, mainly the up-stream of the oil industry. Udofia, the middle-aged Caustic operator, had even a longer working experience; having worked as a construction worker, as a rig-hand and finally with Shell-BP, before joining the Refinery. Like Geepe, Efe and a number of others, the job in the Refinery is the first stable employment they ever had.

Others like Douglass, an Area Operator or Embele, a Fireman, were moving from one 'public sector' stable job to another; but one with greater prospect; at least, so they thought when they took the job. Douglass, from the central part of Bendel State, moved to Warri in 1974 after finishing his secondary education and took up a clerical job with the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) at the sea-port; he was there until 1978 when he moved to the Refinery. Embele on the other hand was a crane-operator in NPA's Port Harcourt sea-port. For many like them, it was a search for something new; sometimes it was the idea of a better PAC in the oil industry -although wage level in the Refinery was only marginally better than some public sector concerns, at the time. For others, the attraction as they explained, was just an urge -based on hope- for something better than their last job. Most, however, had no idea of what the job of plant operator or of a maintenance worker in a process plant really entails.



Like the last category, there are some who joined the Refinery even when it meant a loss in pay. Ogunwale, a Petroleum Engineer in his mid-'30s, was with Shell-BP until 1977 when he joined the Refinery. When he moved he had a drop in pay worth close to 2,000 naira. As he put it;

There are two ways to work for those people [Shell-BP]; you either pretend you're blind or you lick boots. The kind of things they do, eh?, my friend, you either stomach it or you pack out. Oh yes!, they'll pay you well, pay you well to sometimes loose your dignity and for every kobo they pay you, they extract five in sweat. Well, I couldn't take it, the moment the opportunity opened to move, I left!.

Others who left their well paid jobs with the oil TNCs or other private sector firms, might have done so for similar or different reasons. Nonetheless, all of them who joined at senior staff grades did so because the Refinery offered a better prospect of 'pioneer' jobs in a 'pioneer' plant. What separates this group from others earlier mentioned, is of course that they were 'destined' for management cadre posts.

For those employed before 1980, it is doubtful if the PAC was the main attraction. However, since 1980 the PAC -as I will demonstrate later- has altered significantly. There is no doubt that the improved PAC has attracted many new employees, but even for these, the search for an 'Eldorado', is not simply a question of pay.

## 6.2. Recruitment & Training.

The discussion in this section is divided into two part. The first part examines the various forms of recruitment procedure used in the corporation. This discussion places the study findings against the grain of ILM literature, and I also look at the issue of ethnic composition, particularly in the Refinery. The second part examines the processes that workers go through when they are first employed. The emphasis is on the 'on-the-job' training process.

### 6.2.1. Recruitment Processes.

In formal terms, recruitment procedure in the NNPC can be divided into three. One, the use of newspaper advertisement to announce job vacancies; two, recruitment from the Universities and other institutions of higher learning, and three, what is referred to in the corporation as 'unsolicited application'. The first two are important for re-



cruitment into 'management' or 'senior staff' cadres. On the other hand, the recruitment of casual workers -to beef-up the workforce- during the 'turn around maintenance',<sup>1</sup> or the employment of 'junior' workers generally, in the Refinery, for instance, by the 'word of mouth'. No formal advertisement is placed, but as in the case of formal recruitment, a formal letter of application is essential for a full-time job. The latter would apparently fit into what Manwaring called the 'extended internal labour market' (1984). In the literature, the line is often drawn between 'formal' and 'informal' hiring procedures (cf. Bridges & Villemez 1986, Manwaring 1984).<sup>2</sup> Even Manwaring's statement of intent 'to show that... most labour markets are characterised by degrees of closure' (p.161, emphasis in original), went only as far as proving that the internal labour market is subject to 'closure'. It is however important to examine the 'formal'/'informal' distinction in the light of the Warri or NNPC experience.

The Refinery has the autonomy in employing workers on salary grade levels (GL) 17 to 9 which are the 'junior' staff or 'junior management' jobs.<sup>3</sup> Recruitment and deployment of staff on GL10 and above are done centrally in Falomo. Recruitment into the lower GL jobs in Warri could not be advertised, the Recruitment Officer explained, because the vacancies in these jobs are generally far in-between and not worth the cost of advertising; vacancies are made known by 'words of mouth'. For those who are close enough to the post to know when it is (or going to be) vacant, it is possible to tell friends or relations who are looking for jobs to apply. As in most recruitment processes, the procedure involves stipulating the minimal qualification and applicants are then 'short listed' for an interview. The interview panel is made up of Personnel department staff and a representative of the section in which the vacancy exists. The 'cost saving' device of waiting until there are enough posts to be filled before arranging for interviews, is nor-

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the biennial maintenance overhaul of the instruments in the Plant. Process operation is 'shut-down' and every column, every valve is inspected and serviced.

<sup>2</sup> See Bridges & Villemez (1986) for some of the literature on United States, and Manwaring (1984) for some of the earlier works in the UK. 'Formal' media of recruitment include advertising, job centres, college, etc. 'Informal' media, on the other hand, include 'words of mouth' or personal basis of making vacancy known and employing workers. The distinction obviously owes much to Weber's linkage of 'formality' and 'rationality'.

<sup>3</sup> The distinction is explained in the next section.



mally used. Anyone who has a 'candidate' therefore, puts in the effort at the stages of passing on the word about the vacancy, and the short-listing. Information about the requisite qualification and idiosyncrasies to 'exhibit' at the interview, are passed-on to the candidates. It is not uncommon to make your 'sponsored' candidates known to members of the panel. If the number of 'sponsored candidates' are many, the chances are, barring an outstanding performance, candidates with the basic qualification, and 'senior' or 'middle' management backing, would be in a better position of getting the job.

If we consider recruitment into senior staff and management positions where 'formal' recruitment procedure is supposed to be used, problems with the 'formal'/'informal' distinction also emerges. In many instances, awareness of vacancies or recruitment drive -and NNPC was one of the few 'public sector' establishments employing people when others were retrenching workers- is by oral transmission. Even when jobs are advertised, the first batch of applications are in the Personnel Department before the advertisement appears in the newspapers. The jostling or 'campaigning' for candidates is tougher here than in the lower jobs, and getting the job could depend on 'who you sabi' [whom you know]. The problem is not qualification; with some 21 universities and 4 times that in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, a remuneration package well above the Civil Service offer, and all the benefits of 'public sector' jobs, the Corporation is always awash with 'unsolicited applications'. While the corporation is able to 'pick and choose', for the job-seeker, it is a process that could depend on having an 'anchor' inside. The strength of the 'connection' is significant and might even involve senior management staff, in what one Personnel Officer calls, 'negotiated settlement', i.e an informal agreement on the number of candidates that can be sponsored. In other words, from the inside, it reflects internal power relations -essentially the level of exercise of power of Capital-. It is important to stress that this is not necessarily kindred connection. It could, as in a number of cases I am familiar with, result from the candidate having spent an initial pre-formal employment period, working in the corporation and is found 'suitable'.<sup>4</sup>

In a number of other cases, the post could have in reality, been filled before the advertisement went out. Going through the motion in this case is simply a question of

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<sup>4</sup> These are mainly former ITF (see Ch. 1) or National Youth Service attaches.



'regularizing' the person's employment; make the whole thing legal, sort of, so that a formal letter of employment can be issued. In cases where higher level jobs are created or filled by bringing-in people from within or outside the oil industry, the formal procedure of advertising and interviewing might not even be followed.

The distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' procedures assumed in most discussions of recruitment (see Manwaring 1984:177-8 and note 2), only to the appearance of things, in this situation. To assume that it is purely a problem of 'underdeveloped' societies, would be pedestrian. Manwaring (1984), for instance, notes similar pattern in filling top level post. The issue is not whether or not there are 'formal' and 'informal' channels, but whether the distinction assumed between them is not more tenuous than the literature suggests. Second, Manwaring's category of 'extended internal labour market' is an obvious advance on the 'dual' labour market theses of Kerr (1954), Doeringer & Piore (1971), Piore (1975, 1984) and others. However, Manwaring shares the neo-classical/Weberian presumptions of these works (cf. Nolan 1983). Finally, the 'extension' of the ILM is not necessarily limited to (junior or manual) workers employment, as Manwaring assumes.

The nature of labour-power utilization in the Refinery involves two distinct groups. There is on the one hand, the stable employment of the 'employees' of the Plant and on the other, a small group of 'casual labourers' from the adjoining villages of Ekpan and Jeddo. The latter are not employed by the Refinery but undertake the daily cleaning of the refinery grounds, and sometimes deployed for planting and tendering of flowers and hedges around the Plant, etc. The 'recruitment' of this group of workers is peculiar, and requires some attention. One of the problems the government had with the local communities was over the direct benefits, that having the refinery built on their land, would bring to them. In a compromise deal reached with the 'community leaders' of the two villages, the NNPC management agreed to a program called -in the case of Ekpan-, 'Ekpan Community Project'. Among other things, the project involves employing people from the villages on such jobs as those mentioned above. The wages are then paid into the



Project's coffers -a more innocuous front for the village chiefs-. Part of this is then paid to those who did the work, by person(s) in charge of the Project in the villages.<sup>5</sup>

The nature of recruitment in the Refinery and the labour market in Warri, for that matter, has led to a distinct pattern of the workforce which requires some comments. In August 1985, 78.9% of the total workforce was from Bendel State, this high density is more prevalent among the 'junior staff', averaging 87.7%. For 'senior staff' employees, the percentage of those from Bendel State ranges between 75.5%, 45.4% and 20% for those on GL13, GL8 and GL5 respectively. 76.4% of my survey sample, for instance, is from Bendel State and 62% of this from Warri or the adjoining local government areas (N=254). The relatively high proportion of Bendel State indigenes in the workforce does not suggest relative ethnic homogeneity among the 'junior' workers, for example. Bendel State is widely poly-ethnic, and as I explained in the Preface, so is Warri, with three major ethnic-nationalities within a 4 kilometer radius. Explanation for this concentration, especially among 'junior' workers derives mainly from the fact that many were born, grew up and schooled in these areas. Working in the area, where there is suitable employment, seems obvious; there is, however, a deeper sense to it. For many, the cultural emphasis on family ties and cohesion and the retention of this is a significant force; the growth in employment opportunities, in the 1970s, in the Warri area makes this increasingly possible. Some of those from the immediate locality, still live in the family habitat. There is no doubt that from GL10 posts upwards, where staff deployment is centralized, the tension between career and being close to 'home' has to be resolved one way or the other. In addition to the cultural factor, there is also the 'catchment area' policy of the Federal government on employment into low-pay jobs in State-owned concerns. This policy requires that the organizations should make efforts to employ people from the state in which it is located. This policy, in the case of the Refinery, may simply coincide with the availability -and the lateral mobility- of the labour-force. 20% of the lowest paid workers are, for instance, from outside Bendel State and averages 12.7% for all 'junior' workers.

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<sup>5</sup> This is the pre-colonial communal ethos turned on its head, and adapted to wage employment; first, under colonial capitalism and later under post-colonial peripheral capitalism. This method was also widely used by the drilling and exploration oil companies until the 1970s. The village chiefs -whose power became absolute, or invented, under colonialism- act as 'labour contractors'.



By contrast the national picture of NNPC (excluding the Refineries) shows a more even distribution. Indigenes of Bendel State (the largest), constitute 22.19% of the total workforce of NNPC, 16.02% of Management staff, 19.26% of Senior staff and 25.92% of Junior staff. While much political mileage is often made out of 'Federal Character'<sup>6</sup> in the federal institutions, neither the overall employment pattern in NNPC, nor the recent promotion of personnel during the December 1985 reorganization, reflect such thing; least of all, the idea of the domination of NNPC's top posts, by people from Northern Nigeria. Other aspects of this issue, will be examined in Chapters 8 and 9.

### 6.2.2 'Welcome To Your New Life'.

Although the 'Condition of Service' manual mentions the 'induction' course as the first point of 'welcoming new employees to their new lives', as a Personnel Manager puts it, this varies with the nature of work. In the administrative areas, 'induction' is simply a 'welcoming session' during which new employees are familiarized with the organization and the operations of the corporation. In absence of a large number of 'recruits', the ceremony may not even take place. For those who work in the operational areas of the Refinery -Production and Maintenance-, the induction program is the beginning of the work, involving a formal program. For anything between 2 and 4 weeks, new Operators and Maintenance technicians attend the Training School, for a formal and intensive training session. The School, initially run by Comerint -an Anglo-Italian firm- is inside the Refinery complex. There, the 'students'; secondary school, polytechnic or university graduates, are given theoretical lessons on the technical processes of refining. This program is more intensive for those who are going to work in the process areas. The training also include safety awareness and the handling of hazardous conditions. As I will argue in Chapter 8, the 'social construction' of what is an accident or work hazard starts here.

At the initial stage of the Refinery, most of the polytechnic/university graduate workers, were sent to Italy, Japan, and United States for on-the-job experience of refining operations. Since the 1980s this program has been sharply cut and is generally used in areas of new operations; the Alkylation plant in the Refinery and the new Petro-

<sup>6</sup> The is the policy which says that occupancy of public office (or public sector employment) should reflect the states of the Federation.



chemical plant next door. The Training school, by 1985, was being run by the indigenous staff, although an agreement with Comerint, means the school is jointly operated.

The Training School period is followed by on-the-job. Regardless of the qualification of process operatives or maintenance workers, they spend the initial period of employment as 'trainee operators' or 'trainee technicians'. In the last chapter, I cited an Area Supervisor who said no two refineries are the same. The emphasis then, was not on the operations per se, but the peculiarity of each refinery. New-comers in the process areas would spend between a year and two years before being allowed to handle operations on their own; this applies more to secondary school graduates than degree holder. During this period a trainee Operator is under the directive of the Area Operator but afterwards, the Operative is allocated to a specific instrument or section. The nature of process operation and the need for Operators to understand which valve to turn in an emergency, for instance, underscore the insistence that everyone should go through all the training and operational stages. As the Area 1 Supervisor noted;

Before you tell someone to do something, you should be able to do it yourself, we've handled all the jobs ourselves.

Perhaps for the same reasons, there is a strong restriction on crossing boundaries of operational demarcation. External Operators are barred from the panel, unless officially assigned to understudy the Boardman, neither are they expected to enter the Control Rooms 'except on business'. For the Operators however, this restriction could be a block to learning; Douglass the Area Operator of my shift-crew explained;

Son'time ago Willie,\* dey organize di t'in, say may we com' dey learn abou' di Board small small. You know say when our oga\*\* hear di t'in, 'e jus' tear head for 'am. We dey willing to learn abou' di job, even do di work wey pass our salary, deh naw wan', deh dey deny we di opportunity. O' men di t'in na scar for our mind. Since dat time we jus' dey, dey look dem.

Sometime ago, Willie organized it so we could learn about the control panel operations. You know when our boss heard about it, he just went wild. Here we are, prepared to learn about the job, even do a job above our pay scale, and they don't want to know; they're denying us the opportunity. It's a scar in our hearts, mate. Since then we've kept to ourselves.

[\* the Chief Operator. \*\* the Superintendent's name was mentioned here]

In the Maintenance department on the other hand, job boundaries are very rare. In allocating work the Foreman would however, give the more serious jobs to the more ex-



perienced workers. On jobs to be done outside the workshop, a work gang with 'trainee technicians', will usually have an experienced old hand as the gang-leader. Although a formal training period is not as obvious as in the process areas, this does not mean it is non-existent. Learning, in this case, is an uneven process, as Iware, an Instrument workshop technician explained;

It can be under a year, depends on the individual...[pause], well that depends also on what instrument you mean. Some we come in contact with almost everyday, Okay, you can learn very fast on those ones. Others we may not see for more than once in every two years. For a new person, that could be difficult. Well, we all experience that but the other thing is when you come like this, you can watch other people doing the thing, but if you don't work on it, you may not be able to do it well some other time.

In a sense, job training is a continuous process, and the pooling of collective 'tacit skill' is vital for skill dissemination, cutting new corners, discovering a new way of soldering the resistors to the circuit board, without affecting other parts of the board, etc. In both Maintenance and Production, this collective dimension, underwrites 'skill' sharing and the sense of solidarity within the workforce (cf. Manwaring 1984, Manwaring & Wood 1985), an issue that will be examined further in the Chapter 7.

### 6.3. Pay, Conditions and Career Structure.

When the NNPC was created, it inherited the Public service pay and staff structures, but added a touch of something new. In 1974, the Udoji Commission restructured the Public Service pay structure into 17 salary grade levels or 'GL'. GL01 is the lowest civil service salary grade and GL17, (the highest) is attached to the post of Permanent Secretary. NNPC on the other hand reversed this grading for its staff, viz. GL17 is the lowest and GL02 is attached to the post of Managing Director. Given the connection between career and PAC, I will approach the discussion in this section, from the perspective of the pay structure.

Before unionization in 1980, NNPC's pay situation was tied to that of the Civil Service, and the difference in respect of lower grade workers was minimal. The pay structure was also divided into 3 categories; viz. the 'Junior', 'Intermediate' and 'Senior' staff. Junior staff refers to those on GL17 to GL15, Intermediate cadre refers to those GL14 and GL13. This was at the time, referred to as the 'Supervisor group' in the Refinery. Se-

nior staff on the other hand referred to those on GL12 to GL2; this gradation was inherited from the colonial Civil Service. With the emergence of NUPENG and PENGASSAN in 1980, the boundaries were re-drawn. The result was the designation of workers on GL17 to GL14 as 'Junior Staff' (NUPENG members), and those on GL13 to GL8 as 'Senior Staff' (PENGASSAN members). The Intermediate cadre was abolished, while employees on GL6 to GL2 were re-designated 'Top Management'. Alternatively, those on GL13 to GL10 are classified 'Junior Management', those on GL09 to GL07 as 'Middle Management'.<sup>7</sup> Figure 6.1 gives a graphic breakdown of Warri Refinery's personnel distribution in the light of the changes in boundaries of staff grouping.

### 6.3.1. Pay and Conditions.

The PAC structure in NNPC strongly reflect the clusters discussed above, for reasons that will be fully discussed in Chapters 9 and 10. The PAC system in the Corporation can be separated into two aspects; the basic salary, and the 'fringe benefits'; the latter may be subdivided into two which I call 'Primary' and 'Auxiliary' benefits. 'Primary benefits' are attached to the salary grade level -or post- and are received in kind or in form of cash, along with the salary at the end of the month. The 'Housing allowance' for instance is paid, along with the salary where the corporation does not provide residential accommodation for the employee. The 'Transport allowance' is paid out in lieu of the provision of transport for the employees; other forms of 'primary benefit' include the annual leave pay. The provision of medical care or canteen services can also be classified as primary benefits, since they affect every employee and are sometimes paid in money-form.

'Auxiliary benefits' on the other hand, derive from specific situations and are not but normally calculated as part of the salary, e.g the payment of travel expenses when someone is on an official trip, etc. These of course, reflect the recipient's location in the hierarchy. The basic salary and primary benefits affect every employee, but auxiliary benefits rarely do. Separating the 'basic salary' from the 'primary' benefits, and the primary from auxiliary benefits, helps one to understanding the mode of surplus-appropriation and 'pay differential' in the corporation; e.g. between the plant Operator and the

<sup>7</sup> See Appendixes E(i) and (ii) for the Salary Scales before and after April 1980, and Appendix F (i), for the pay and career structure.



General Manager. One can also start to appreciate the perception of the PAC, among the workers.

The basic salary that the Corporation adopted in 1977, as I mentioned, was based on the civil service structure [see Appendix E (i)]. In working out the details, particularly of top managerial pay, the oil industry, not the Civil service, was the basis for comparison. Since then two events have affected the basic pay in NNPC. In 1980 the national minimum wage was raised to 100 naira, and later that year, a NUPENG wage demand led to a 15% and 10% wage rise for those earning below 3,000 naira and above respectively. These two events pushed the minimum wage level in the corporation to 117 naira. As evident in Appendix E (ii), each salary grade has between 1 (GL02) and 6 (GL17 to GL14) pay incremental steps, with different rates of increment. The increments sometimes reflect length of stay in one salary grade, or in lieu of promotion to another grade. Increasingly in the Refinery, moving from one step to another, depends on the (annual) assessment report. A worker's Supervisor or Superintendent has to recommend him/her for the increment.

Although the minimum wage level is 117 naira per month, the increase of the minimum wage to 125 naira in 1982 -following intensive NLC agitation- means that the minimal scale on which anyone can be employed in NNPC is GL17 Step 3. Neither these changes in national minimum wage, nor the 1980 NUPENG wage demand, has narrowed the pay differential in the corporation. The Managing Director earns over 14 times as much as the lowest paid worker, and the General Manager in the Refinery nearly 12 times as much, this however refers to only the 'basic pay'. Although workers are paid on a monthly basis, there is a '13th' month salary attached to the 'basic pay', and paid out at the beginning of December.<sup>8</sup>

The significant changes in the Pac in NNPC relative to the Civil Service, occurred between 1980 and 1982. During the period, NUPENG and PENGASSAN negotiated increases in the primary 'fringe' benefits; mainly the 'housing' and 'transport' allowances. By the end of 1982, the Housing allowance for junior workers had increased from 10 naira

<sup>8</sup> This was negotiated by the Unions in 1980 and is called 'Christmas bonus' in the rest of the oil industry.

and 40 naira, to 40 naira, 50 naira and 60 naira for workers on GL17 and GL16; GL15 and GL14, respectively. However the differential in the same benefit for the last grade for 'junior' workers (GL14) and the first grade of 'senior' staff (GL13) increased from 0 naira in 1980, to 40 naira in 1981, and 130 naira in 1982. The successful prosecution of an industrial dispute by PENGASSAN in 1982 resulted in significant differences in Senior staff/ Junior Staff remuneration package. On the average, a 'junior' worker would earn 95 naira in allowances as against 336.7 naira by a 'senior' staff employee.

An overtime rate of 150% of normal rate is paid to 'junior' staff who work overtime during the weekdays and 200% during the weekend and public holidays. Some benefits are however peculiar to the Refinery. Shift allowance is paid at the rate of 1.2 naira for those on GL17, 2 naira and 2.5 naira for those on GL16 and GL15 respectively. For those on GL14 and above, the rates are fixed at 720 naira per annum, and '15% of annual basic salary subject to a minimum of 800 naira', respectively (NNPC: Conditions of Service: Appendix 1, p.2). Senior staff personnel 'on call' duty, are paid 70 naira month. A Turn Around Maintenance allowance of 40 naira, 60 naira and 150 naira is paid to workers on GL17 to GL15, GL16, and GL13 to GL7, respectively. However with the increases in benefits for the 'senior' or 'junior' staff employees, the middle and top management had negotiated with the Corporation Board or the Civil Service for increases in their own benefit rates. By 1983, the housing allowance for the management personnel had been raised from 240 naira to 500 naira, in 1980. Some aspects of this will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

The differential in PAC extends also into such areas as provision of canteen facilities. In the Refinery, the eating areas for 'junior' workers and 'senior' staff employees are partitioned, although under the same roof and eating similar food. The difference with the 'management' canteen section is even sharper. The Management canteen is on the ground floor of the Administration Block, away from the heat and formica-top tables of the general canteen; the tables are draped in white lace with flowers in glass vases. A three course meal and menu lists are provided for, with stewards on hand to take the meal orders. There is none of the hassle of the general canteen area; the long queues or having to wait for as long as 30 minutes before getting your meal. The emphasis is no



doubt on relax-while-you-eat and the idea is to simulate the top-class restaurants. This canteen is reserved for people on the Deputy Chief grade and above (see below). The situation in Warri is replicated in Falomo, except there is no separate 'senior' staff section, there is not enough floor space for that. Shift workers in the process areas are however separated from this, everyone on shift eat in the areas of the Control Rooms set aside as the canteen. This situation is however, for operational reasons rather than the management's attempt to create an egalitarian ethos.

A much sharper distinction in PAC is evident in the provision of housing facilities. In Lagos, staff members on GL7 and above are provided with official residence in Victoria Island and Ikoyi and in Warri, those on GL9 and over live in the Housing Complex. The complex is about 2 kilometers from the Plant, off the the main road linking the plant to Warri-Effurun town. A two minute drive from the plant and a right turn off the main road takes one through the Ekpan village. At the turning is a large Police station and barracks, built by the Corporation as part of the refinery project. From the edge of the village, and separated by a river, the complex comes into view; at night, it stands bathed in its street lights -a world removed from the oil lamp-lit Ekpan, yet less than 10 meters away. At the complex's gate, the Security Guards check the visitors and issue passes. The main drive-in is bordered by trimmed hedges and green lawns. The grounds of the houses are bordered by the hedges, each with its front lawns and rear gardens. The sizes of the houses and their facilities betray the recreation of the hierarchy at work. The General Manager's residence is draped in white paint! -the only one painted white. Its wide green lawns, rear garden and the design put it a step above the residences of the Managers, Deputy Managers and other departmental heads. These with smaller lawns and their double car ports, are spread round the complex's many 'avenues', 'streets' and 'closes'.

Each house has its own wide-spaced living room, the dining area, and a reception port on the ground floor. The bedrooms are on the top floor, and every room has its separate air conditioning units, humming away day and night. Separated from each of the duplex houses are small unit of houses for domestic servants -"boys' quarters", they call these. To the rear of the complex are the three-storey blocks, each with eight, three bed-

room, flats which are occupied by lower rank staff. The complex has its schools, -run by the Corporation-, for the children of residents and its sporting facilities, ranging from swimming pools, to lawn tennis courts and snooker tables. It has its clinic and here the water and power supplies do not fail. The senior staff club provides something of an evening/night-life.

On the other side of town, in Warri, Geepe, the plant Operator, lives in a single room, in one of the 'urban poor' neighbourhoods. His bed, other pieces of furniture, radio set, and other belongings are crammed into a twelve by ten room; the 'conveniences', are on the other side of the compound. He cooks his food like his other neighbours, on pavement of the house, by his door step. The power and water supply are as erratic as the change of government, and here, there are no tarred roads; many like him live in similar accommodation. Douglass, on another side of town, lives with his wife and baby girl in a two-room apartment; the house is tucked between two other ones, cutting off the sun, and an open sewer runs by his door step. Here there are no green lawns, no trimmed hedges, just bare soil. The water and power supply are no better than in Geepe's, and the 'conveniences' are anything but convenient.

The situation in Lagos duplicates that of Warri, although the top management live in Ikoyi while the Deputy Managers and Chief Officers live in Victoria Island. The rent on most of these accommodation range between 60,000 and just under 90,000 naira a year. A General Manager in an 84,000 naira per annum house, consumes the equivalent of the housing allowance of over 116 workers on GL15, and there are the chauffeured company cars and defrayed telephone, electricity bills, etc. The workers on the other hand are spread around the metropolis; its shanty towns -like Maroko and Ajegunle- and the not so shanty ones.

It is against this background of the differential, not only in basic salary but in 'benefits', canteen services, the housing facilities, etc., that we can begin to comprehend the overall character of the 'ILM'; the nature of distribution and consumption of social surplus, in its various forms. In this sense, the relations of appropriation of surplus, reflect the wider issues of class relations and the centrality of the State for the emergent 'technocratic' bourgeoisie. On the other hand, it is within this conception of the ILM, that



we must understand workers' perception of, and revolts against what they see as inequitable relations. These will be discussed further in Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

For the moment, it is important also to appreciate the evaluation of the reproduction of the worker, not just in terms of the exchange-value of his/her labour-power, *per se*, but the extent to which his/her remuneration enables the worker to shoulder his/her the social responsibility. As Echerio, a Maintenance worker in his 40s, noted;

Person wey dey level 17, a t'ink na 168 naira or so, na'im 'e dey earn. Wetin 'e go take 'am do?. Me wey dey here so na five children 'a get for primary school and 'a get two for college. A go pay school fees, buy dem books, go pay rent. How 'a go feed? ...If 'a naw come overtime for weekend, how 'a go meet up?... Even wit' shift allowance sef' it can't favour we, because our basic salary dey low.

Someone on GL17, you know earns about 168 naira or so. What can he do with that. For instance, I have five children in primary school and two in high school. I'll pay their fees, buy them books, pay house rent. How can you survive on that pay well?. If I don't do overtime at weekends, how can we make ends meet?. Even with shift allowance, it's still against us, because our basic pay is so low.

He may have 7 children, but his comment is representative of the majority of people I worked with. It is worth noting that the dependants he calls his children may not be so in the biological sense, some may be relatives living with him, perhaps from the family in rural area. For instance, 77.2% of the unmarried respondents (N=57) to the survey have 3 or more dependants. 50% of these group in 'senior' staff grade, have 5 dependants or more. The overall picture is that 61.1% (N=242) have 5 or more dependants, but at the same time 63.4% have no other wage earners, with whom they share the responsibilities. This does not of course, mean they have no other income earners, but from my understanding of the situation, if they have any, these are likely to be spouses who are involved in petty trading. With the accelerated decline in farming activities, the previous situation in which the 'peasant economy' has contributed towards the reproduction of the wage labourer; in the form of food stuff sent by relatives in the rural areas, has been seriously undermined. On the other hand, the displacement of rural population, especially young people, has meant increased pressure on the relatives who are in wage employment. A picture reproduced among the Refinery workers.

### 6.3.2. The Career Structure.

The career structure in NNPC also reflects other debts of the corporation to the Civil Service. First, as in the Civil Service case, there are three main career lines, which determine the possibility of advance of an employee regardless of his/her work context. These career lines or grades are (i) the 'Officer' grade, (ii) the 'Supervisory' grade, and (iii) the other workers' grades, for the junior staff. Second, like in the Civil Service, the candidates educational qualification is the primary determinant of one's career line.<sup>9</sup> The possession of primary education certificate means that one's career prospect is limited to the junior staff bracket. In the Refinery, those affected include the Office Attendants, the Cleaners, and the Security Guards. They are usually employed on GL17 but the prospect of moving beyond GL15 is extremely limited.

Those employed with post-primary school certificates are of two kinds. Those with primary education and trades certificates, e.g welding, fitter mechanic or professional Driver's certificate,<sup>10</sup> are in one category; a 'modern' or technical -vocational- school certificate falls also into this category. The second category covers those with secondary school -or equivalent- education, people in these two categories are employed on GL16. In the Refining division, these are the trainee posts -Trainee Technicians or Trainee Operator. In the Administrative division, GL16 is attached to the Clerical or vehicle Driver posts while in the Security department, those with military or police service background and primary education, are employed on this grade. For these groups of workers, their career advance -without further certificates- ends in GL14 posts, this is mostly the case for those in the Administrative division. In Maintenance and Production on the other hand, there is a possibility of reaching GL12. For most workers, the only way to go beyond GL14 is by 'converting' to the Supervisory grade, which may involve having additional certificates. In the case Operators, there is now an emphasis on science-related qualification, although at the initial periods of recruitment the corporation was content to have anyone and re-train them.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix F (ii) for an outline of the Nigerian educational system and the possible line of movement between the various branches.

<sup>10</sup> The Trades Test certificates are issued by the Ministry of Labour. Others in this category are City & Guilds, Pitmans and other certificates



The Supervisory grade is for those with post-secondary but non-university education, this includes those employed as secondary school graduates who went on to acquire other qualifications, e.g accounting, electronics, etc. In the main, the grade affects those with Polytechnic or the College of education qualifications, the 'entry-point' for the Supervisory grade is GL13. However people with the polytechnic Higher National Diploma (HND) are employed on GL12. The career advance here -see Appendix F (i)- is from Supervisor Grade 2 to Chief Supervisor posts. Take for instance the Administrative divisions, the career titles range from 'Personnel' or 'Accounts' Supervisor 2 to 'Chief Personnel Supervisor'. In Production or Maintenance however, people with polytechnic diplomas come in on the 'Technologists' career ladder. The career line goes from that of 'Technologist 2' to the 'Chief Technologist'. Advancement beyond GL8 post requires 'conversion' from the Supervisory to the 'Officer' grade.

The third line is the Officer grade, reserved for those with University education. A fresh university graduate is employed on GL12 and the career ladder stretches hypothetically up to the post of Managing Director. In Administrative divisions, posts carry the 'officer' designation; e.g 'Personnel Officer 2' or 'Chief Personnel Officer'. Among 'professional' groups, the designation is more profession-specific; e.g 'Senior Accountant', 'Chief Engineer' or 'Chemist Grade 1'. The initial point of entry has significant implications for advancement and rate of mobility. As a senior Personnel Officer explained;

those converted to the Officer cadre can only rise to GL06, that is the Deputy Manager post. Those who join NNPC with degrees; the Officer, have nothing to worry about, they can rise to GL02, they can become Managing Director. Definitely not all can, but there's always the chance, who knows.

While in most areas of the work, the rigid demarcation of career lines coincides with the boundaries of labour activity, in some areas this is not so. In Production and Maintenance for instance there is a complex over-lap between career advance and work performance. As I explain in Chapter 5, in the process areas Operators are designated in terms of the operations they perform; Trainee Operator, Heaterman, Area Operator, Boardman, etc. In each of these cases, there is a congruity between career position and work: a trainee is recognized as such on the career ladder, a Heaterman is an Assistant Operator, while an Area Operator is recognized as an Operator. By the same token, the

Boardman is usually on the Senior Operator grade, while a Chief Operator is the peak of the Operator grade.

At the initial stage of the Refinery, most of the plant workforce were secondary or pre-secondary education graduates, so the congruity between work and career was maintained. Increasingly however, recruitment in Production and Maintenance is being geared towards University and Polytechnic educated staff. Since these new corps of process workers would be performing the same jobs as the secondary educated Operators; e.g Boardman or Chief Operator duties, career and work are increasingly becoming entangled. Since a Petroleum Engineer more easily gets 'promoted' from working as an Operator in the plant into the Control Room, the result is that he would have blocked the chance of a senior plant Operator becoming a Boardman. In the case of the latter, the progression to Boardman is not just advance in work performance but a career move.

The result is an undercurrent of hostility between the two corps of workers, who also fall into the junior staff/senior staff dichotomy. A university-trained operator who had been in the Refinery for less than two years can easily have become a Chief Operator while many secondary educated ones who had been on the job for years, remain as plant operators. For the latter corps, this state of affairs is a veritable symbol of the injustice within the 'system'. As Sheke, an Area 2 Boardman, pointed out;

Deh go say because you naw get degree for chemistry, say you know'o sabi di work. Deh naw sabi di work, deh dey do 'am. Deh naw do chemistry, still yet, di work deh go on, o, di work naw scatter. Most of dem get brilliant school cert' result, o. Honest!, if say deh get money go university, deh for don' commot.

They say because you don't have a degree in chemistry, you can't understand the job. The Operators don't understand the job, yet they're doing it. They don't understand chemistry, but the work gets done, the plant hasn't exploded. Most of them have brilliant O/level results. Honest!, if they could afford to go to university, they would have left.

Most Supervisors and Superintendents rationalize the situation with sometimes technical, sometimes 'affective' arguments. A Process Supervisor once argued that;

the Chief Operators\* are usually very good practically, but they have the problem of explaining what happens; what is the reason for a process or the consequence, in technical terms.

[\* i.e the secondary school or OND graduates]



This however, is not just a problem between secondary and post-secondary graduates, the polytechnic-trained engineers are also at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their university-trained colleagues. Ogunyemi the Area 3 Superintendent, explained (reflecting the 'affective' aspect of an apparently 'rational' situation);

you know both HND and degree holders are now placed on the same salary [entry point]. This man...<sup>\*</sup> is an HND holder, and this one<sup>\*</sup> is a degree holder. They're both good... [pause] but where two people perform well, you tend to have soft spot for the B.Sc holder.  
[<sup>\*</sup> tapping the roster, at the point where the names were.]<sup>11</sup>

For most of the time the tension the situation generates is hidden but a very minor incident could spill the bile. For instance, in mid-September, the Area 1 Supervisor, made some notes in the incidence records book. This was mainly the names of people who would understudy the panel operations, but he also included the individuals' qualifications at the end of their names. The Boardman of the crew relieving us, reacted angrily to the last item; "What's all this nonsense?, wetin di degree dey do for insai" [what's degree got to do with it] and used a pencil to cross the offending part. Willie, my crew's Chief Operator -a French-trained engineer- later told me ; "Ol' boy, you have to handle this guys carefully, that thing [the degree/non-degree holders division] is a serious problem. Maybe I would react in the same way, if 'a dey for dem [I was in their] situation".

The possession of 'tacit skill', however, has a lot to do with the workers' perception of the relationship between certificates and the career grading. In Maintenance where there is little overlap between career and job performance, there is little of the tension I cited above, in respect of the process areas, nonetheless, the tension created around the possession of tacit skill is always evident. The problem here is between the technicians who have immense pool of tacit skill but limited formal education, and the Supervisors and Superintendents who may be big on degrees but weak on tacit skill. Sniping remarks are almost on a daily basis and Ijoma, an Instrument technician, captured the essence of the problem when he said;

like the job we're doing now, deh (they're)<sup>\*</sup> suppose(d) to help, to direct the operation. You know we technicians are only suppose to implement<sup>\*\*</sup>, but

<sup>11</sup> All the Superintendents and Supervisors, in the Process plants, have at least a B.Sc degree.

we end up doing the whole thing. And they're supposed to be ENGINEERS!.  
[\* the Supervisors, \*\* with heavy sarcasm in his voice]

In Production where tacit skill has always been a very important factor, similar caustic remarks about 'the oga' [the boss] who cannot light the heater, if left on his own, are common. But the situation has a longer pedigree, than in Maintenance, as an Area 2 Boardman commented about a Superintendent;

When di Italians dey here, and all of us dey for plant, deh naw dey si-ddon sabi di job. Dem na degree holders, na dem go be oga, but we, we put head we learn'am, -wetin you go do? Dat time all of dem dey run around, deh wan' become oga. Now, instead may deh do di work, na book deh go dey quote and when di work com' land, deh go dey take cunny ask you, ma'you do am.

When the Italians were here, and we all worked in the plant, but they never sat down to understand the job well. They're the degree holders, they're the ones who'll become bosses. We had no option than to learn the job. They spent the time lobbying around, on who would be boss. Now, instead of doing the job they quote books at you, when there is a problem they'll cunningly push it to you.

These remarks are, of course, only selective directed at people they believe are arrogant or bossy, but poor at the job. It is, per se, a criticism of 'status' differences but directed against the Supervisory staff, exercise of the power of Capital in excessive ways. My observation is that the relationship does not necessarily derive from differences in educational attainment. For most of the process plant or maintenance the relations are harmonious, if no one 'rubs in' the disadvantages. In fact the 'more educated' workers often help in articulating the ways in which the 'system' is loaded against the less-educated workers as well as the anger this generates. Some aspects of this phenomenon will be fully discussed in the next chapter. For the moment, I will move the discussion of an issue which has been implicit in my discussion so far; promotion as the basis of career advance.

### 6.3.3. Promotion and Career Advance.

Promotion from one career level to another is, for most of the employees, the only means of advance. There is of course another dimension to it, viz., promotion is both a sign of the recognition of the worker's effort and a right. The significance for most workers can be evaluated from part of the survey result. In response to a question, 71.1% said



they would not like a job that pays well but offers little chance of promotion; 82.5% of these expressed strong opinions on this.<sup>12</sup>

The promotion process involves an annual 'staff evaluation' exercise, during which supervising officers express opinions on their subordinates. The evaluation format covers 'aptitude', 'willingness to accept responsibility', etc. The supervising officer score the person being evaluated on each of these items (between 0 and 10). He or she can either recommend promotion, an incremental credit or nothing at all, for the person being evaluated. As I earlier noted, advancing from one step on a salary grade to the next [see Appendix E (ii)] is subject to recommendation. The 'open reporting' system of assessment used, apparently enables the subordinate to respond to reporting officer's comments. While this allows the latter to put his/her opinion on paper, the outcome of an acrimonious exchange is often to the disadvantage of the subordinate; the 'superior officer is seldom wrong'.

In Production department, there is a written examination in addition to assessment exercise. The examination further loads the die against those with lower education. Gaining promotion is, however, still subject to recommendation. As one of the Plant Operators said during a collective interview, there is no guarantee that the test is used at all;

all dat test na nonsense, deh don'  
pick di person, deh wan' promote be-  
fore you'o begin siddon for di test.

all those tests don't mean a damn,  
they'd have picked the person they  
want to promote, before you even sit  
for the test.

Where previously, promotion depended hypothetically on the reporting officer's recommendation, the rule was changed at the end of 1985. What had been implicit in the promotion exercise, to many shopfloor workers, was made explicit. For the junior staff, 5 years was given as the minimum period they have to spend in a post before being considered for promotion. This is against 3 years for those in the Supervisory grade and 2 years for those on the officer grade. The interesting thing is that although the new rule is

<sup>12</sup> Appendix A (i), Q.21(4). Only 12.4% of those who answered the 'Agree' range, picked 'Slightly Agree'. The multiple regression analysis did not reveal any distinct demographic basis for the responses. Educational qualification and job type (the highest) each explain 0.25% of the variation in the pattern.

loaded against 'junior' workers, the (mute) opposition to it is widespread. An Industrial Relations Officer at the Lagos headquarters noted;

After they've moved up some people in the senior management now want to block the way for others. You're asking people to work for 5 years without promotion and you're expecting anything from them; these people don't care what happens to others, that's why they're doing all this.

Before the new policy, as I said, the promotion process had been viewed with suspicion by most workers. In the survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate the fairness of the promotion procedure. 79.7% said it was not fair to everybody (N=237), although about a fifth of the respondents answered "Don't Know", only 5.5% believe it was fair to all. Having been promoted does not seem to have serious effect on the distribution, it explains only 1.3% of the variation.<sup>13</sup> Among those promoted in the 3 years preceding the survey (N=64), 67.2% believe the procedure is not fair to everyone and only 4.7% think otherwise.<sup>14</sup> The issue of promotion as I will explain in Chapters 9 and 10, has become central to union agitation.

On a daily basis of shopfloor relations, the personnel assessment program is a potent weapon in the hands of many supervising officers; in bringing those under them to heel or as a weapon of reprisal. In Chapter 5 (section 2.5), I cited the case of Ojay in terms of the problem of shift work, where someone's relief person does not show up. The normal procedure, as I explained, is that nobody on night shift should be made to work extra hours, because of night-shift fatigue. This time however, the Superintendent insisted on Ojay covering the morning shift, instead of finding a relief, Ojay accepted after much protest. Later during an interview with the Superintendent, the issue came up, and his position was;

Those\* are the problem ones, they can't play with you for any minute. They'll tell you; 'Noooo, oga'. Well, they'll pay for it, it's not that you're being wicked, but you know when their assessment comes, hun?... [pause]\*\* eh, hein!. There's a portion in the [assessment] paper where they'll ask for comment on "Readiness to take up responsibility" and there others too. [\* workers like Ojay.] [\*\* he looked at me, head reclined back, hoping I understood what he meant]

<sup>13</sup> The Correlation Coefficient score is 0.116,  $\chi^2=3.1$ ,  $df=2$  whole  $X_{0.05}=5.99$ .

<sup>14</sup> This is not a question of sample bias, since 67.6% of the sample had been working in the Refinery before 1982. Only 38.8% of these had been promoted since 1982 and only 2.9% of those who joined after 1982, had been promoted.



To be sure he is not typical of Supervisors in the Process Plant. However, for those like him and even the 'nice' ones, the assessment exercise is one of the means available for keeping the 'subordinates' under a tight rein. As I demonstrate in Chapter 7, this process is not uni-directional, neither is it the only dimension governing shopfloor relations. The implications of supervisory power are nonetheless clear on the shopfloor. As Udofia, a Caustic loader noted;

'E go hard before you get son't'ing for here, if your Supervisor naw approve 'am. If you come do son't'ing wey go pinch di man, den during appraisal time, 'e go do 'im own back for you. And you naw get influence reach 'am [...pause]. WHO KNOW WE?!.

Its hard to get anything here, if your Supervisor doesn't approve it. If you do anything to hurt man, then during the appraisal exercise, he'll hit back at you. And you don't have as much influence as he does [...pause]. WHO GIVES A DAMN ABOUT US?!.

#### 6.4. Taking Charge: the direction and discipline of Labour.

The promotion aspect of career advance is by no means the only area of the supervisory and 'bureaucratic' control of labour activity. Furthermore, to properly understand the ILM, we need to take cognizance of these other aspects of the direction and the discipline of labour activity and the worker, -beyond those discussed in Chapter 5. It is to this dimension that I now turn in this section.

In September 1979, the Refinery management released a 12-page document titled "Internal and Disciplinary Regulations.", and distributed it to every employee. Since 1979, every new employee is given one, it spells out many aspects of the Corporation's 'Condition of Service' document. Rather than simply a 'draconian' document, in the prototypical "Internal State" mode it spells out duties, including 'full loyalty and devotion to the Corporation.'(para 2.2); it also spells out what constitute an offence and the punishment. It outlines the 'rights' of each employee, laying out the 'channels of communication', a 'procedure open to any staff to pursue any legitimate grievance as an employee' (para 11). The individual grievance procedure, which I outlined in Chapter 4, has since been incorporated into the Regulation manual. The manual reiterates the safety regulation control rules; e.g where employees could smoke and punishments for smoking. A 'breach of discipline' could attract reprimands from issuance of 'oral warning', 'warning letter', docking of pay or seniority to summary dismissal. The catch clause is on 'insubor-

dination', which could fetch summary dismissal. It provides supervisory personnel the framework for exercising the delegated power of Capital. In reality it is mediated by the specific dynamics of work and power relations, and the idiosyncratic bent of the supervised and the supervising. A Supervisor decides when someone should be reprimanded for something, and is in a position to insist on the punishment, the elaborate regulation does not negate arbitrariness, only gives it the veneer of legality. It is a peculiar form of legality which has to be located with the criteria of -an example will suffice.

Shortly after I joined the Boilermakers, I was in a work-gang of five, -detailed for cutting the metal tubes for a Vacuum unit heat exchanger being repaired. There were, two petrochemical trainees, two permanent boilermakers and myself. With the supervisor, we set the cutting frame, the metal track on which the tube will rest during cutting, the measurements, etc. The supervisor then gave us a 15 minute 'crash program' on using the 'Rigid 350' pipe cutting machine, none of us had done this before and we had 820 tubes to cut. When we started it, the spirit was high and the idea was to cut as many as we could manage, to reduce the work load for those coming for night-shift.

We were on our 25th pipe when the section's Superintendent came round, took out a measuring tape and started inspecting the tubes. Then all hell broke loose; first he wondered "what the hell.." we thought we were doing and went on to compare our IQ with some prehistorical animals, yet none of us knew what it was all about. He called the Supervisor in, and it was then we realised that three of the tubes were some 2 millimetres short. The Supervisor also gave us the benefit of his opinions about our worth, intelligence; the lot. In the end we realised that the error was because the cutting unit (holding both the cutting head and the arrow-shaped driller for 'dressing' the tube edge after each is cut) has to be fully reeled back, along its track at the end of each cutting and dressing of the tube. The problem was the supervisor never mentioned anything like that during the 'crash program' only that we must ensure the tube was marked from the other end of the tracked we laid. My guess was he himself did not realise that it was a possible problem until it happened. One of the boilermakers, a middle-aged man told the supervisor he did not include the source of the error in the 'crash' course. The supervisor shot back;



Shurruup!, you still have mouth [you're still bold enough] to argue with me, eh?. After you've spoilt the pipes, you're still arguing. If you don't shut up, I'll give you query.

Well, that was it. The boilermaker and the rest of us were sitting ducks if the supervisor decided to press charges: he could indict us on anything from 'insubordination' (para. 2.6[iv]) to 'wilful destruction of Corporation's property'. If the anger was swallowed, the work slowed down considerably afterwards as well. The boilermaker, however, noted;

you see wetin dey happen?. 'E naw wan' accept 'im own share of di fault. When you do well, nobody go say you do better t'ing. Make mistake small, na 'im you go know say khaki naw be ledder.  
[\* an adage]

see what's happening?. He doesn't want to accept his share of the fault. When you perform well, no one remembers. Wait till you make a mistake, that's when you'll know khaki is no leather\*.

The point here is that the disciplinary procedure enables the supervising officer to enforce acquiescence, at least in open terms. Even in circumstances where a worker declines to do a job because in his/her judgment the work situation or material is not safe, the coercive power of the supervising officer can be brought to bear on the situation. A Boilermaker once refused to replace the gasket of a valve because he felt the replacement gasket was not of the right grade. The Head of the department told him, "we'll change the gasket and change you..". When I asked one of my work mates what he meant, he replied "na sack bi dat.." ("that's the sack..), this is not an idle threat. In the period between 1977 and 1984, 242 workers were fired, which amounts to 42.2% of those who left the Refinery for one reason or the other (N=574). 41.3% (n=100) of these are from Administration Division. However 48% and 30% of these are from General Services and Security departments of Administration, respectively, where there are high concentration of 'junior' workers. 35.1% of the total fired in the period is from Production department. Figure 6.2, gives a breakdown of the labour turn over in the Refinery between 1978 and 1984. As we can see the sacking of employees increasingly dominated the mode of the turnover. 'Voluntary' withdrawal had declined, relatively in the same period coinciding with the downturn in the country's economy, and as I argue in Chapter 10, with the period

of union strength on the shopfloor. As also clear the expulsion of workers was again in ascendance.

Expulsion is not the only form of reprimand as evident in the Supervisor's threat above. An examination of some of the discipline records between 1981 and 1983, also reveals a massive bias against 'junior' workers. On the average, over 90% of the queries or warnings issued are for 'junior' workers. In the record of 16 months I looked at, it was only in 6 instances that any senior personnel was queried, warned, or dismissed; in three cases there was only one case of such reprimand. This might seem to confirm the arguments of Piore (1975, 1983) -which Edwards and his colleagues share- that workers in the 'secondary' labour market are often, behaviourally, unsuitable for 'primary' labour market. Most of the junior workers as I earlier showed, moved into the refinery from typical secondary labour market jobs. They would seem not to possess the 'rule orientation', which Edwards (1975:11) takes as the minimal indicator of the 'correct work behavior' (ibid) necessary in 'primary' labour market firms.

Both Piore and Edward, I believe, are glamorizing what is essentially a 'blame-the-victim'<sup>15</sup> attitude. It was not my experience that being a 'junior' worker (ex-secondary labour-market person) necessarily explains the 'tendency' to infringe on the Corporation's disciplinary codes. Rather the very relations of production (in work), defines the situation in which the same offence when committed by a 'senior' or 'management' staff person, escapes reprimand (e.g lateness to work), while the 'junior' worker will most likely be punished for the same offence. Here the relationship among those charged with the exercise of the power of Capital (and therefore the reality of that power), defines who gets punished. Worse still is that what is defined as an infringement in the case of junior workers is not recognized as such when done by management personnel, e.g 'loitering'. The discretionary power (arbitrary, for all it's worth) of discipline, leaves the 'junior' workers in a very vulnerable position. The statistics therefore only reflects the power relations, rather than being sacrosanct by itself.

The argument that 'secondary labour market' workers are unsuitable for 'primary labour market' jobs, mystifies the power relations immanent in commodity production. As

<sup>15</sup> I owe this phrase to Omafume Onoge.



Udofia, the Caustic loader, earlier reminded us; they (the 'junior' workers) do not have as much 'influence' as the Supervisors; ability to redress any injustice has to be put within this context. Although there is the provision for workers to respond to queries in the discipline procedure, but this is hardly effective. Udofia's gut statement was borne out by the Refinery's Discipline officer, herself;

We ask people who have queries or warnings to reply to it. To be honest with you it doesn't mean much. You can't put the man there as the boss and overrule him when he gives a query... Well, you're going to undermine him if you do that. Okay, if you have a query and can get someone to appeal to the boss, then he can withdraw it, if not the query will have to go into your file or the necessary action taken.

The fragility of process technology operations, and the need to avoid a breakdown, is officially used to justify the severity of the discipline procedure. Uninterrupted production is needed, so human error arising from 'misdemeanour' has to be limited. However, that these requirements necessarily leads to layers of monitoring, direction and not often severe disciplinary measures, proceeds from the viewpoint of capital and commodity production, not the human point of view (cf. Braverman 1974). It is also anchored on the fundamental relations in that production, which defines the bearer of labour-power as an object of production. A 'reasonable' exercise of discretion is, of course, necessary in disciplining the performance of labour. Again, it is not just the creative capacity of the worker which is subordinated to the criteria of commodity production, but his/her humanity as well.

## Conclusion.

I have explored, in this chapter, the many facets of the 'internal labour market'; its characteristics, content, and to some extent the forces which shape it. I have shown that the ILM in NNPC, (in terms of benefit, salary, promotion prospects, etc.) derives from multiple sources. On the one hand, the colonial capitalist remuneration system has survived into the post-colonial period. It has found deeper argument in the absence of, on the one hand, socialist social services (houses, education, health etc.), and on the other hand, credit facilities available in the advanced capitalist economies. Furthermore, the emergence of trade unions in the corporation has led to significant changes in the remuneration system.

neration packages, relative to the Civil Service, for example. The national union struggles has also led to the changes in minimum pay rate, although this is only meaningful for those in wage employment in the major sectors of the economy. Finally, the character of NNPC, as a unit of State-Capital, involves its management in a contradictory relation with other units of State-capital and the public sector. This issue will be developed further in Chapter 10.

I also expatiated on the dynamics of the internal differentiation within the 'ILM', which reveals fairly rigid demarcations along the line of educational qualification; this in turn affects everything from the basic pay to benefits. This must be properly located within the emergent class relations in Nigeria, which is becoming ossified (see Chapter 3). For the immediate analysis, attention is drawn to a significant aspect of the character of the Nigerian peripheral capitalism, namely that the determination of the mode of appropriation of social surplus (-value), falls on those exercising State power. The determination of the different wage levels and the conditions of service in the Corporation, has to be understood within this context. This discretionary power of what Dudley (1972) calls the 'praetorians' of the State, is however governed by bourgeois ethos, a replication -no matter how deformed in its final form- of advanced capitalism. The idea of educational qualification as the basis of career advantages or insertion into the hierarchy of work, derived from British colonialism. This however is finding greater impetus in the present context.

One thing that becomes clear therefore, about the ILM is that it is not a market. Not in the sense in which marginalist (neo-classical) labour market theorists conceive of 'market'. The limit of what can be achieved seems set right from the beginning, and finding new impetus in new rules on career mobility. It is not a question of relative ownership of 'educational capital' as the basis of class relations in production, but the reverse; it is a distinct bourgeois ethos, that at one instance limits educational achievement and then turns it round as 'the basis' of career prospect.

Further more, most ILM writings, rooted in dual labour market theses, have tended to assume some form of homogeneity in the ILM. Edwards et al (1975), advanced on this by distinguishing the "independent" and "subordinate" segments of the 'primary labour



market' (1975:xv-xvi). The content of their argument, and in particular of Edwards' (1975, 1979), however suggest that this is a minor problem. If the emphasis is moved away from a 'social stratification' neo-Weberian perspective, and we re-conceptualize production, the internal 'segmentation' is more fundamental in the so-called 'primary labour market'. This is well illustrated in the NNPC case. Not only does the surplus-value appropriation derive from proximity to the exercise of the power of capital, but so does employment. For the shopfloor workers, employment is more precarious. The advantage of the 'primary' labour market is not being underplayed -at least relative to others in the 'secondary' and 'tertiary' labour markets or the unemployed, that seems commonsensical enough-. The argument however, flows from a failure -to reemphasize the point- to appreciate the essence of production and, analytically, retain that viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> The capitalist production involves a definite capital-labour relation, it involves value production and the appropriation of surplus-value. Rather, the neo-classical (neo-Weberian) argument derives from the perspective of wage distribution; which deflects attention from the overall nature of surplus-value appropriation in society. The danger, politically, is that it pitches one segment of the working class against another. Furthermore, the chances for the average shopfloor worker to end up right back in the unemployment queue or 'secondary' labour market is great, relative to that of the other groups we have looked at.

The dichotomy between the arbitrary 'simple' control and the 'rule of law' 'bureaucratic control' has, in my view, been overstressed. The point of my argument is not that there are no distinctions, simply that in exercising the delegated power of capital, the supervising personnel exercise great (arbitrary) discretion. While making fine points about the differences in the exercise of those power, it should not be forgotten that they are forms of the dominating power of capital. The curtailment of the arbitrary power -as will be clear in Chapters 8 and 9- flows from shopfloor and union-based struggles against it; sometimes overt, sometimes covert. I imagine that in the absence of unions -as in the types of firm Edwards (1979) used to illustrate the point- the discre-

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<sup>16</sup> This is unfortunate in Edwards and his colleagues case, since they actually start from a 'marxian' perspective -to use Shaikh's (1980, 1981) phrase.

clear in my discussion so far, one cannot assume that the existence of 'grievance procedure' means its vitality.

In addition, the issue of the reproduction of labour-power, when conceived as 'simple', technical reproduction, fails to deal with the worker beyond being an object of production. In other words, no more of an advance on marginalist labour market theses. A social understanding of the worker suggests a social reproduction, involving what is differently seen as the 'real' wage. This is an issue that industrial relations has grasped, even if in the eclectic combination of 'sociological insights' with labour economics. Both this and the internal differential in appropriation of surplus-value, underscore workers' criticism and serve as a vehicle of day-to-day struggles on the shopfloor. While I accept the claims by Burawoy (1979) Edwards et al (1975) Edwards (1979), Stone (1975), etc that these issues in the ILM, facilitate the coordination of the interests of workers and capitalists (or those exercising the power of capital), the case may be overstated. As I will demonstrate later, while sometimes adopting the idioms of management, or conducting some of the criticisms and struggles within the terrain set by Capital, the workers' struggles may derive from what I call the 'alternative morality'. About what should be the objective of production, the distribution of value, expresses, in sometimes fledgeling, sometimes definitive forms. But then is that not the nature of consciousness?.

Finally, while I find Manwaring's (1984) category of 'extended internal labour market' (EILM) useful, and an advance over other analyses derived from marginalist criteria, his argument still has marginalist instincts in it. In addition, the EILM, as in this case reflects the hierarchical exercise of the power of capital.



FIGURE 6.1.

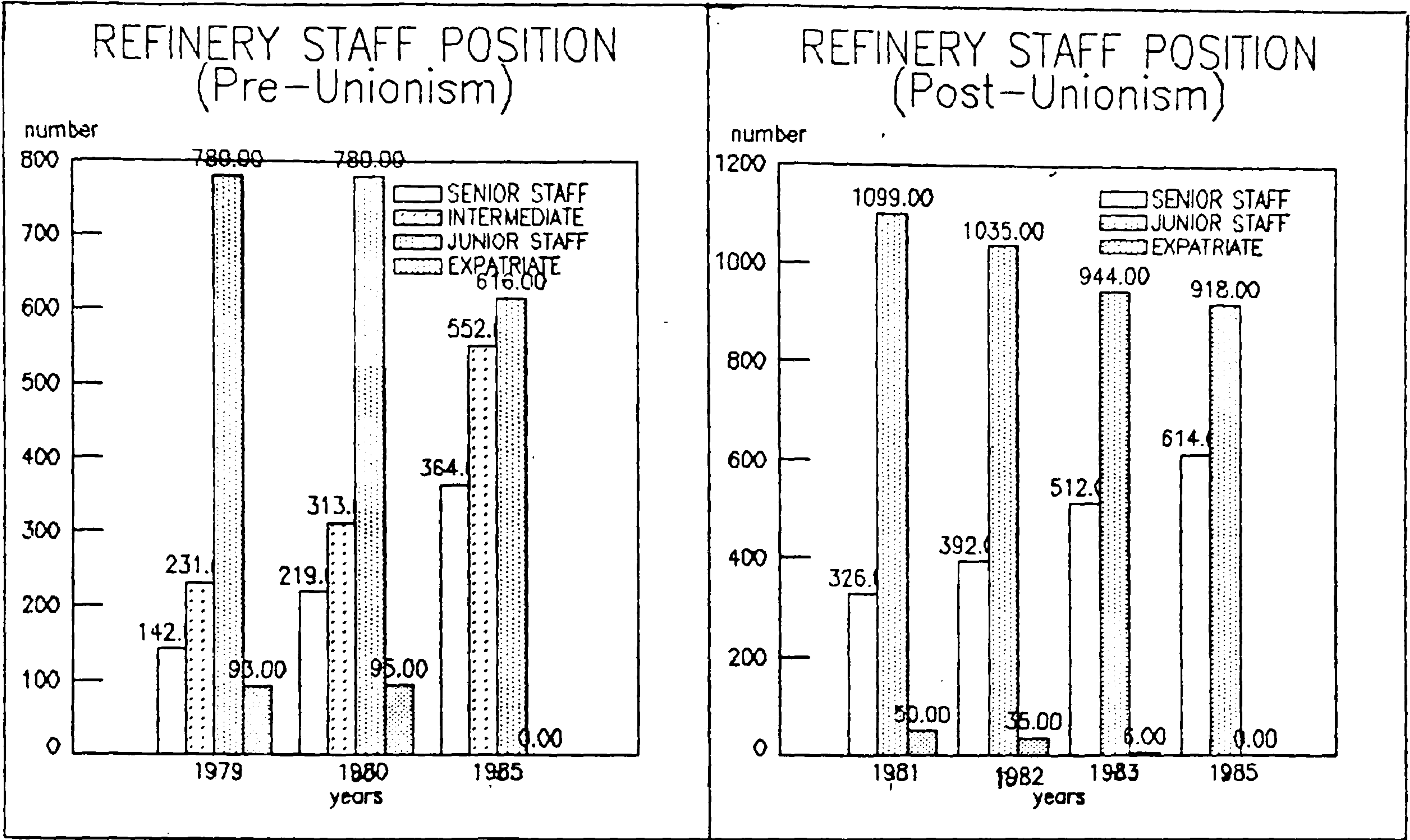
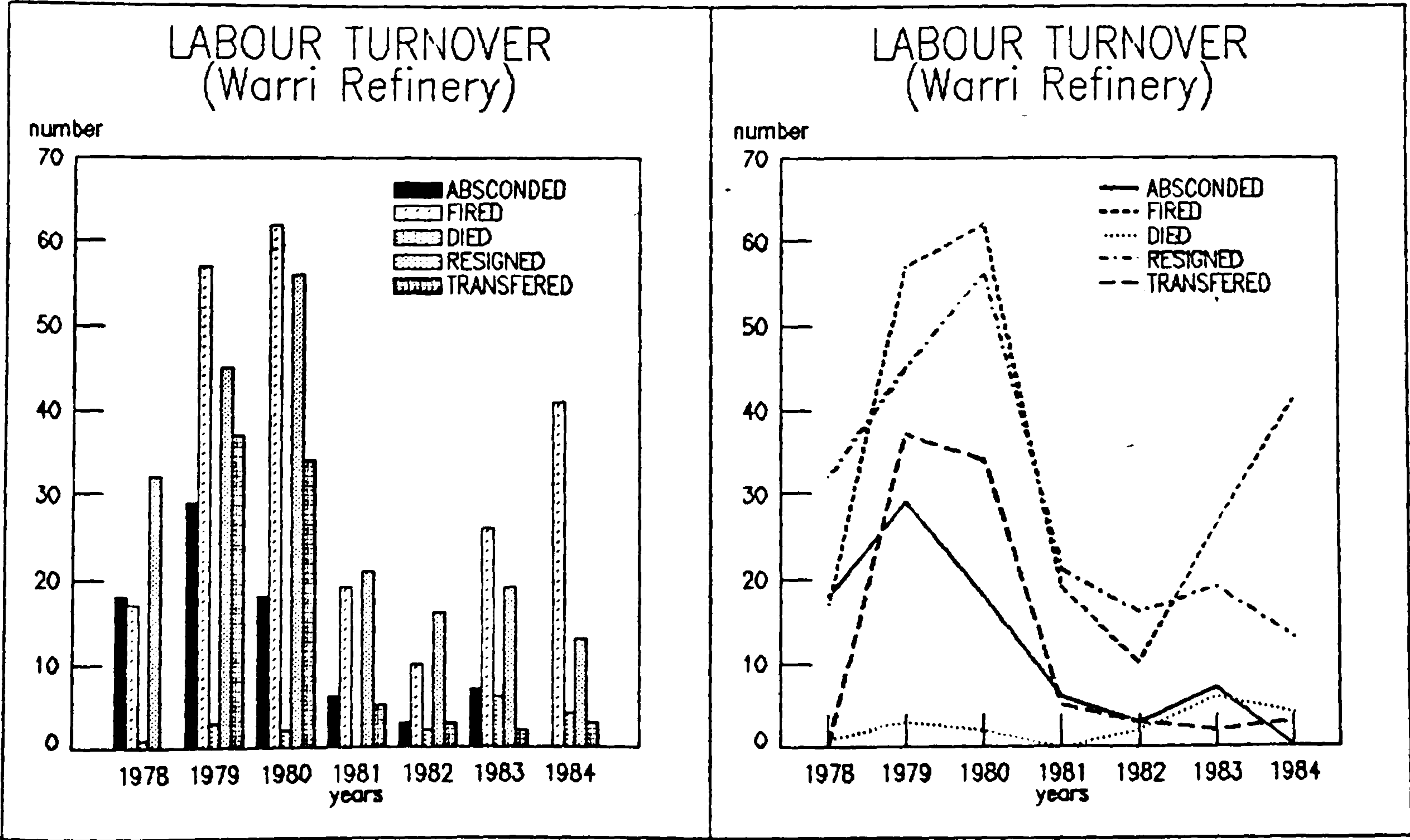


FIGURE 6.2.



## CHAPTER 7.

## SOCIAL COMMUNITIES IN WORK.

## Introduction.

This chapter examines some other dimensions of work relations, with emphasis on shopfloor life. In the last two chapters, I examined the nature of work and work relations from the perspective of value relations, i.e. the worker as an object of production. This chapter looks at those relations from a different angle, i.e from the perspective of the 'deconstruction'<sup>1</sup> of value relations. The emphasis on the nature, dynamics and reproduction of collectivities in work, is on the extent to which people express themselves as active human agencies, rather than simple objects of relations. This argument is not simply painting the 'other side' of work relations, but expresses the method of 'one-sided abstraction' (Elson 1979). In other words, moving from one aspect of a totality to another, in order to lay bare the complex, contradictory, character of work relations, which gives 'totality' its meaning.

The analysis will focus, primarily on two forms of 'communities in work', which I call 'Vertical Communities in Work' (VC/W) and 'Lateral Communities in Work' (LC/W). LC/W involves the more recognizable collectivity or community of shopfloor (or office) workers. VC/W on the other hand, deals with the social relations between supervisory staff and their 'subordinates'. It is also possible to identify a third, which involves attempts at promoting a 'corporate collective': an identification with the Corporation. I will argue that although the last form involves active involvement of Management, explaining it simply as attempt at 'subordinating' or 'incorporating' the workforce, would fail to grasp its complex basis and its interaction with LC/W and VC/W.

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<sup>1</sup> I use 'deconstruct(ion)' as 'to break down', rather than in the neo-Kantian sense of literary criticism, which claims there is no single correct interpretation of artistic works.



The VC/W raises a number of theoretical issues in the light of conventional analysis of supervisory personnel. A number of workplace studies -especially the radical ones- perceive the Foreman, for instance, as an unmediated agent of capital (Burawoy 1979, Edwards 1979, Stone 1975, etc). There is however, a tradition in Sociology of Work which recognize that supervisors sometimes act in concert with their subordinates, in opposition to management. The 'man in the middle' thesis (Roethlisberger 1943) explains this phenomenon from the perspective that supervisors are 'torn by competing demands and loyalties' of management and the workers (Fletcher 1969:341). Some of these writers suggest that the ambiguous behaviour of supervisors is a result of their dwindling power (Child 1975), or that this reduction in supervisors power 'exacerbates' their ambiguity (Fletcher 1969). Although Fletcher rightly argued against the 'monolithic' classification of foremen, -inherent in the original thesis- his 'reformulation' still rests primarily on the same premise.

My argument, vis-a-vis Burawoy, Edwards and others, is not that supervisory personnel do not exercise the power of capital -that much, I have made clear in Chs. 5 and 6-, or that they do not do so in coercive ways, rather that this cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, particularly against the 'dwindling power' subset of the 'man in the middle' thesis, I argue that the ambiguity of supervisory personnel is immanent in the production itself. Supervisors at once perform the global functions of capital and at the same time the function of the collective worker (Carchedi 1975, 1975a). The former involves directing and coordinating the labour activity of others. As aspects of the collective worker, supervisors expend labour-power, and therefore share the concrete-labour experience of the workers (Marx 1976:549-50); they are also subsumed under the dictates of capital. These form the basis of the VC\W, although its articulation<sup>2</sup> is culturally specific and is strengthened by previous collective struggles in the Refinery. The results of the empathic relation between supervisors and the supervised, that VC\W implies, could be seen in the alliances between senior and junior staff unions in the plant. On the other hand VC\W can, as Burawoy (1979) recognized, become the basis of the intensification of

<sup>2</sup> I use 'articulation' in the sense of 'give form or expression to' not in the althusserian sense.

labour. I will argue that it is in the contradictory unity of these two aspects of the VC\W, that we can appreciate its essence.

Workers' collectivities or 'solidaristic' relations in work is something that is widely recognized in most sociological studies of the workplace. Here I will explore the root of LC\W in the labour process -the terrain of concrete-labour activities-, and the extent to which the organization of work eases the development of social community spirit. The LC\W, I argue, is a 'microcosmic' class identity, but because it is based on experiential relations of the labour process, it can also segment the workers along unit or departmental lines. However, LC\W I argue, underwrites workers' autonomous re-creation of relations at work. In underpinning the processes of 'microcosmic' class reproduction in work, LC\W becomes the terrain of cultural activities and the premise of workers' collective defence. In this connection, I will further examine -see Chapter 5- the viability of the of Burawoy's (1979) characterization of "workers' adaptation to work" (Baldamus 1961) as 'consent'. I argue that while workers are 'adapting to work', they are also adapting the work to themselves. While Burawoy is correct in highlighting the limits of workers' 'autonomy' in the workplace, his case I believe, is overstated. Underscoring the LC\W, I will argue, is an 'alternative morality' distinct from the capitalist or bourgeois ethos. The weakness and strength of LC\W need careful, dialectical handling.

The LC/W and VC/W represent distinct evidence of workers' redefinition of their roles in production, and the specific forms they take must be located within the specific cultural context. As Willis notes, 'non-work supplies many of the categories and meanings for work but it can only be understood in relation to work and is finally shaped by it.' (1980:187). On the other hand, the terrain of work give rise to a distinct redefinition of 'non-work' relations, and I use the deconstruction of ethnic relations (see Note 1) to demonstrate this. Either way one cannot see work relations as epiphenomic reflection of orientations people 'carry' to the workplace (Goldthorpe et al 1968) nor sustain an argument about the self-sustaining autonomy of the labour process (Burawoy 1979:Ch.9).

This chapter is divided into three sections, in which each 'social community' is examined.



### 7.1. The Nature of the Corporate Collective.

The thrust of Cressey & MacInnes (1980) piece, was to argue on the extent to which workers' interest can become coordinated with that of their employers. One implication of this phenomenon is that we cannot take the antagonism of value relations for granted. Burawoy has developed the other dimension of the argument -also in Cressey & MacInnes (1980)-; that the workers' economic survival depends on the survival of the unit of capital which employs them. I have demonstrated, in Chapter 5, the extent to which the coordination of interest between workers and management, flows from the duality of labour activity itself. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated the distributional relations' aspect of the workers livelihood. In this section however, my discussion of the 'Corporate Collective', is to demonstrate the extent to which the immanent duality of labour process (or workers' economic dependence on capital) expresses only one dimension of the coordination of the labourer's (perceived) interests with Management's. The other dimension of this process reflects the extent to which relations do not just flow out of the 'given conditions of production', but are actively cultivated (e.g. by the functionaries of capital). In other words the active ideological efforts to develop corporate citizenship, i.e allegiance to, and identification with, the 'Employer'.

Edwards' (1979) work also focused on how the large corporations are increasingly trying to foster the spirit of corporate collective among their employees. This he explained in terms of the ILM of the 'primary labour market' firms. However as Joyce's (1980) study of work and society in 19th century North England shows, the fostering of collective identity with (owners and functionaries of) capital is not a recent development (cf. Burawoy 1985:Ch.2). The process is also not peculiar to the 'industrial workers' as Newby's (1979) study of agricultural workers show.

In NNPC, the cultivation of corporate collective has taken many forms; from the organization of sports and leisure activities, the use of internal newsletters and the projected corporate image by Management. Above all that the character of the corporation as a unit of State-capital puts it in the unique position to generate corporate collectivity. Both the dynamics of corporate collective, and implications for work relations is examined first in relation to sports and leisure activities.

12 February 1983 saw the grand finale of a three-day sports fiesta of the NNPC. Three days in which over 300 sports persons representing the four operational zones of the corporation had engaged in the first competition of its kind. As befitting the status of the corporation, it took place at the National Stadium in Lagos -the nation's biggest sporting complex-. It was a fruition of an idea conceived two years earlier -which 'received the blessing of Management..' (NAPETCOR 1983:23, 4(2)). The fiesta was the final phase of the sports competition that had been going on within the various operational units of the corporation for a year. The closing speech of the corporation's Managing Director<sup>3</sup> reflects the satisfaction reported in NAPETCOR, the corporation's quarterly news magazine. The chief executive declaring;

it gives our Management great pleasure to see employees of all grades and cadres playing together. I enjoin you to ensure that this communication process and team work transcends the sports field and permeates your working relationships in the office and in the operational areas for the benefit of the Corporation and of Nigeria as a whole." (NAPETCOR 1983, p.23, 4(2))

As he noted further;

In encouraging sports, we are also investing in good health and higher productivity.(ibid)

This was somewhat reminiscent of Henri Deterding's Royal Dutch Shell 1936, Nazi-style, sports extravaganza.<sup>4</sup> The Lagos fiesta represents a more general trend within the corporation. There were by mid-1985 no less than four NNPC football clubs playing in either the State or National Football league. The Warri Refinery Football Club, the most successful of the teams, was the national Second Division league leader in 1985 and promoted to the First Division the 1986 football season. In many locations of the Corporation, there are different types of sports facilities.

While, there has been major encouragement from Management in the development of sports, and NAPETCOR would, no doubt, report it as 'investing in good health and higher productivity', the emergence of sports activities is both 'fortuitous' and a matter of tradition. In terms of the latter, sports -in particular football- has always relied on

<sup>3</sup> This was at the end of what is reputed to be an outstanding soccer match between Warri and Port-Harcourt zones.

<sup>4</sup> See (UK) Channel 4's 'OIL' eight-part documentary series, Autumn 1986



companies setting up employee football clubs and teams. Up till the 1970s for instance the major names in Nigerian Football leagues have been associated with establishments. To a significant extent, corporate prestige, it was argued by football enthusiasts in NNPC management, also flows from having teams bearing the corporation's name in the League.

On the other hand, the rapid development and proliferation of sports activities in NNPC cannot simply be explained in terms of tradition. Since most NNPC projects are located in remote areas of the country, the provision of recreational facilities has often been taken as part of the project. Sometimes the sports activities have been developed by the employees, in these remote locations, who did not want to die of boredom, after work; the Warri Refinery is an example of these two aspects. At the initial period of the refinery, the absence of recreational facilities in the town meant people had to look inwards for sport and general recreation. The housing complex already had football pitches on its grounds, and the first series of soccer matches were purely recreational; these were mainly within the ranks of junior and 'intermediate' workers. By 1980, fully fledged inter-departmental competitions were being organized. The formal adoption of a team by the Refinery management was aided by a number of soccer enthusiasts within the Management.<sup>5</sup> By 1985 when the club had assumed a semi-professional status, the performances of the team or its players had become an integral part of shopfloor discussion. Matches involving the soccer team were usually preceded by handbills sent out during working hours, mustering support for "our boys"; both the players and those who run the Club are employees. The latter take up the duties on voluntary basis, while the player-workers are devoting more time to soccer: a result of their league success.

The implications of the above issues for the discussion here are two-fold. First, although the club is not an official 'institution', it was initiated by the employees. One cannot therefore see it as an outcome of managerial 'strategic' initiative. Nonetheless, and this is the second aspect, the club and the exploits of its players have become a vital aspect in the cultivation of a collectivity organized around the firm. One only needs to witness the gusto with which the club is cheered by the workers at the Warri township stadium, or the cloud of gloom which settles on the plant when the team lost a major match,

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<sup>5</sup> The first chairman of the football club is a former Head of Production.

to appreciate this factor. Managers, Supervisor, Operator, Cleaner and Driver are, at least for those brief moment, united in the 'NNPC clan'.

A different dimension of the cultivation of the corporate collective is a general development of recreational facilities. In most of the operational locations of the Corporation there are staff clubs, which cater for general after-work recreation. This is organized strictly along seniority lines, there are separate junior and senior staff clubs. In the Refinery, the senior staff club is within the housing complex. It provides bar and restaurant services, billiard and other games rooms, and the evenings and weekends are almost a continuation of work relations in a less formal environment. The General Manager, like an imperial chieftain 'graces the club with his presence' once in a while. The junior staff club, -established after a protracted union agitation- is located just outside the fenced perimeters of the Plant; in Saipem Camp.<sup>6</sup> Like the senior staff club, it has bar and snack facilities, but not a cosy restaurant or the games rooms. Its lush furniture, carpet and air conditioning however set it apart from what is available in the town. The club has the distinct air of catering for 'NNPC workers' and their guests. The distinct constituency which is being constructed through these staff clubs, is a constituency of unit of capital. Even when exclusion barrier of junior/senior staff is part of these clubs' realities, the junior worker is being constructed as a member of the 'NNPC family'.

There are other dimensions to the constitution of the 'corporate collective', and to date the regular hosting of christmas parties by the Corporation for its employees and their families -since 1980- is another important factor. A substantial part of the celebration is devoted to children, and gifts are handed out by 'Father Christmas'. Professional comedians and drama groups are brought to perform, and the children sometimes stage their own plays. The parties, as NAPETCOR once put it are meant to generate 'a family spirit across the various levels' of the corporation's hierarchy, in the hope that this 'spirit will permeate their working relationship.'

A more pervasive dimension of the attempt to cultivate the 'family spirit' are the two in-house news journals; the monthly bulletin called NNPC NEWS and the quarterly magazine, NAPETCOR. Both are published by the Public Affairs Department in Lagos,

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4 where I explained what the 'camp' is.



and are distributed free to employees. The NNPC News is a broadsheet which cover events in the Corporation or those involving its employees; from the junior workers to the Managing Director. Napetcor on the other hand combines news coverage with a more intellectual disposition. It carries, in addition to news items, articles on petroleum industry operations, management studies, short stories, cartoons, etc. Both journals cover events involving employees and their families; weddings, child-naming ceremonies, bereavements, or successes outside the work context. The coverage of weddings or child-naming ceremonies has positive effects on the individuals involved. The feeling for many is like appearing on the television or in the newspaper, particularly among people who would not normally 'make news'. It nourishes a sense of belonging.

Napetcor also regularly carries back-cover advertisements of the Corporation which, although are part of the projection of a corporate image, have significant effects on the cultivation of the corporate collective. Four of such advertisements are presented in Appendix H, and they reflect the diversity of issues these advertisements raise. The first three -H(i) to H(iii)- emphasize the degree to which NNPC is not only the 'pillar of the Nigerian economy', but also on the cutting edge of the technology for national development. In addition to being the revenue base of the economy [H(ii)], NNPC also 'fuels the fleet that keeps the nation moving' [H(iii)]. More importantly, NNPC is not just producing, but it is pioneering the technology for 'Nigeria's industrial take-off'. In Appendix H(ii) the emphasis -of corporate self-perception- shifts to the idea that NNPC is making real today what are the stuffs of dream. NNPC is turning the forbidden 'murky swamps and sand wastes into gold... black gold'. It is important given the readership of the magazine, that all these 'accolades' are interpreted as something being bestowed on an abstract corporation. NNPC means everyone who works in it; from the plant Operator as well as the Managing Director. They fuel the nation, brave the 'frontier' of technology and significantly, are involved in 'national development' efforts. Work is not just about commodity production but making 'Nigeria great'.

The implications is that it makes people 'feel good' about being part of NNPC, and as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, there are many who believe they are involved in national development, that their concrete-labour activity is the stuff that keeps the nation going.

To that extent, an earlier argument needs to be further developed. While the workers' concrete-labour is often identified with the use-value dimension of the commodities they produce,<sup>7</sup> this identification does not simply flow from concrete labour per se. These perspectives are actively articulated by Management and as elements of the corporate collective, the advertisements contribute to the workers' identification with the corporation. In any case, the item on Appendix H(iv), which speaks directly to (potential) employees, not only guarantees to fulfill their technical dreams but also the job of a life-time.

All this is not to suggest a 'grand design' of management to 'hegemonize' the workforce; but the effect is certainly to encourage a sense of 'corporate collective'. But what are the implications?. As will be further discussed in Chapter 8, one should approach the contradictory elements in workers' ideology from the contradictory dimensions of lived experience, and from the perspective of the ideological activities of the dominant bloc in society. Second, the ideology of corporate collective reveals the extent to which the expenditure of labour-power does not simply rely on the self-propelling force of production, but are ideologically articulated. The corporate collective often becomes the terrain where the humanity of the worker -denied in the labour process- is recognized and acknowledged. Nonetheless, what cannot -and should not- be assumed is a notion of 'incorporation' or pathological 'subordination' of the workers to the employer. First, the image of the workers' concrete-labour acknowledges the reality; it is not just a case of management hood-winking the workers. Second, the corporate collective, as will become clear in the next two sections, is not the only collectivity in work, neither is it the most potent. Nonetheless, corporate collective is an aspect of the complex -often contradictory- totality of the worker's experience of work. What I have tried to do so far is expatiate on this aspect of the 'totality' in the procedure of one-sided abstraction.

## 7.2. The Vertical Community & Work Relations.

In the Introduction to this chapter, I have outlined in general terms the framework of the VC/W. In the Chapters 5 and 6 some aspects of the VC/W have also been raised. This section examines the diverse bases of the VC/W and its implications for work rela-

<sup>7</sup> E.g petrol, aviation fuel etc., are not identified as 'goods' with exchange-value but as use-values which 'fuel the fleet that keeps the nation moving'.



tions. Vertical Community in Work refers to the reconstruction of work relations in such a way that workers and supervising staff do not confront themselves only as 'determined' objects of production, but as human beings. In this instance, the primary value relations gets redefined in the process of empathic interaction between supervisor and the supervised. I have mentioned earlier some of its implications, both socially on the shopfloor and politically.

### 7.2.1. The Rise and Dynamics of the Vertical Community.

To understand the specific form that VC/W takes in the refinery, particularly in the Production areas, we need to go back to the beginning of the Warri refinery operations. Between 1978 and 1981, as I noted in Chapter 4, nearly all aspects of Refining Division's operations were under the control of the Snamprogetti's Italian staff. In 1979, for instance, there were 93 'expatriate staff' in the Refinery (see Fig 6.1). 55 of them were in Production department and 22 were in Maintenance department; functioning as Boardmen, Chief Operators, Supervisors and Superintendents. By 1980 the number had gone up to 95. The technical agreement under which Snamprogetti was managing the plant, involved the gradual transfer of operations to the Nigerian personnel; the 'Nigerianization' process. All the personnel recruited, in the refining area, as I have explained, normally spend time on the shopfloor; this was also the case, under Snamprogetti management. However there was an increasing feeling among the indigenous personnel that Snamprogetti was deliberately hampering the nigerianization process in order to protect its lucrative management contract. What however exacerbated the situation, was what the indigenous staff saw as the prevalence of racist attitude on the part of the Italian personnel. Racial prejudice, many believe, fed the high handedness of the Italians treatment of the Nigerians. As the Area II Boardman recalled during an informal discussion;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The discussion followed the Referee's handling of the 'losers' final' between the Nigerian junior side and their Soviet counterparts during the Junior World Cup series, played in Soviet Union in September 1985. Although the Nigerian side won, the Referee reminded many of the Italian personnel.

Di way deh dey take behave dat time you go t'ink say to operate di refinery na magic. You see as all of us dey here so, when every t'in cool so?. For where!. even to see black face for here na wah. If you wan move near di board deh go shout: 'No touch!, no touch!!'. Na only dem dem go dey around.

The way they behaved, you'd think operating the refinery is magical. You see how things are now, how easy people take things?. No way, it was rare to find a black person around here. If came close to the panels, they'd shout at you: 'No touch!, no touch!!'. They were the only ones you'd find around [here]

The significance of the period for a discussion of VC/W is that most of the Boardmen, Chief Operators and Supervisors in 1985/6 were working as plant Operators at the time. They experienced the harshness of shopfloor life alongside the people they now supervise. Plant Operators told me of an instance when Oloba, currently a Supervisor was accused by an Italian shift supervisor of abandoning his post during the night shift. If the other operators had not rallied round and backed his story, and insisted it was all the Shift Supervisor's mistake, he would have lost his job. Oloba confirmed the story.

A chief operator described in exuberant terms the workers' reaction to this regime;

Ah, my broder, na revolution. People come dey tamper wit' di valve; turn 'am small until di tin' go trip di alarm for Control Room den, you go return 'am to normal position. Come see how deh\* go run come insi'e plant, but everybody go jus' dey look\*

[\* the Italian panel operator]

Ah! it was revolution, mate. The blokes were tampering with the valves; turn it gently until it tripped the alarm in the Control Room, then return it to its normal position. You should see how they'd\* shoot into the plant, but everyone would pretend like nothing was wrong.

This experience of collective struggle figures prominently in the narrative and explanation of many supervisory personnel, when they overlook the a worker's violation of work rules. This supports a continued sensitivity about the nature of the labour process, particularly in the production areas. Between Chief Operators and the plant operators, there is a relaxed application of the rules which forbid the latter to come into the Control Rooms (CRs) except for instructions. Very often this is ignored, as long as the chief operator does not feel the plant operator is ignoring his work, particularly on afternoon and night shifts when there are no senior management staff in the plant. As Willie, a chief operator explained;

We have to be liberal with them (Operators), it's not easy... but when you work in the plant you realise how things are... the managers don't always know that.



Unlike the Gouldnerian (1954) 'indulgency pattern', workers' violation of work-rules are not just tolerated in order to enhance production, but because the supervision have a sense of shared pain of the process of labour. This leads to the redefinition of work relation, sometimes in opposition to management. This redefinition of relations could take the form of CR Operators spreading the word of the sudden appearance of a senior manager in the plant, so that Plant Operator who may be asleep or not in their posts are not caught unaware. In a number of cases, particularly during night shift, the public address system or the telephone link between the plant and the control room has been used to alert everyone. It could turn out to be a false alarm, but no one seemed to mind, the next time round it could be for real.

In other circumstances recommended penalties for infringing company rules are overlooked. An instance was a case of a Radio Operator who was called a number of times on the wireless without any reply, because he was not at his desk. The Shift Superintendent who was returning to his office in the MCR building came to the radio desk to ask the fellow where he was earlier. The Superintendent was apparently not convinced by the explanation he was given; but surprisingly -to me of course- he went on to explain the risks. The calls were made on channels open to everyone in the complex, including the General Manager, with a walkie-talkie, and they would have would have known he was not at his desk. The next time he left the desk, he should call up two or three people on the open channel and say he wanted to go to the clinic, that way he would cover his tracks.

The extent to which shared experience of the labour process constructs the VC/W between the supervision and their subordinates is demonstrated by a fire outbreak in September. The fire incident, in the process plant, would have meant a severe reprimand for the Operator in a different situation; but the Supervisor refused to press charges. He argued that anyone with experience of working in the area would realise that it was difficult to blame the Operator, except in a case of 'gross negligence'. In any case, they had been warning 'management' about a possible fire outbreak in the section for some time. The Supervisor in this case was a Deputy Chief Engineer; by no means a 'junior management' person.

The VC/W is not limited to the process areas. In Falomo register is used to monitor attendance. At 0745 a line should normally be ruled below the last signature, and anyone signing afterwards is registered as late, but in a unit of the personnel department the line is usually left until around 0830. The Head later explained that he knew from experience the problem of getting to work on time for those living outside Lagos island. As long as no one makes a habit of lateness, he did not mind leaving the book open.

An important basis of the VC/W is the extent to which sustained interaction between the supervisors and their subordinates helps to redefine the primary work relation. In the process the relation of boss/bossed is transcended, people begin to know each other as human beings; someone with a family, a sick child, etc. This does not necessarily coincide with shared experience of the labour process or a previous collective resistance as mentioned above. The interaction is more subtle in its effect on the mediation of work relations. I noted, in Chapter 5, a Shift supervisor who had acquired notoriety for his imposing sanctions against people he found sleeping on night shift. In the MCR, however, he seemed quite a different person from the infamous person I heard so much about. This is where he had his office and his shift rota coincided with that of Shift B crew. His relations with the Boardmen and Chief Operators had therefore been on a sustained basis. The method of 'surviving the night shift' is diverse; from intense debates, to music (see Ch.5 and below), but most important is taking a nap in relay. All these are, officially, illegal but the Shift Supervisor had become embedded in the ethos. Whereas he handed out reprimands in other units, here, if someone fell asleep for an extended period, he would walk to the person's table, tap it until the fellow woke up or he would call from across the MCR; to rouse the fellow;

A beg, may'una wake up, di one wey  
you sleep don do. Abi ya wife naw  
gree you sleep for house. You naw  
leave 'am chop-money?.

Wake up, man, you've slept long enough.  
Didn't your wife allow you to  
sleep at home. You probably didn't  
give her maintenance allowance?.

Assorted jokes like this are not peculiar in relationship between the immediate boss and 'subordinates' and are often a means of reconciling the contradictory aspects of their relations.



While I have highlighted the elements of the VC/W which have their roots in the production environment, one should recognize other elements of it which stem from the non-work context. These are often aspects of the indigenous cultural relations. In the Electrical workshop for instance the message reproduced below -written in felt pen- was pinned to the notice board.

\*\*\*\*\*

READ ME

GOOD NEWS TO ALL ELECT SHOP  
WE ARE BLESSED AGAIN WITH TWO NEW  
BABIES FROM MESSERS OKE & NWANAFO

AS USUAL YOUR TEN NAIRA (N10.)

\*\*\*\*\*

Both the 'blessing' and the money contribution concern the whole of the workshop, the monies go to the mothers; their colleagues' wives. This form of gift is a common traditional practice for many of the Nigerian nationalities and is not uncommon in many other units, although not always in the strongly collectivist fashion of Electrical workshop. Home visits, to condole co-workers, subordinates or bosses and their families, are almost obligatory, in cases of bereavement. So are home visits to congratulate them for the arrival of a new baby in the family, for instance. Travelling with co-employees to their home-towns for weddings, burial ceremonies, etc., are also not uncommon. The VC/W essence of these is that work relations often take on a more personal character and to that extent help people to rescue their humanity from the depersonalizing criterion of commodity production.

### 7.2.2. Vertical Community In Perspective.

Having illustrate the sources of the VC/W it is important to explore its implications for work relations. I have insisted that one should approach work relations as primarily wage form relations organized around commodity production. Two principal, but contradictory, implications of the VC/W flow from this perspective. First, the VC/W in moderating the primary relations of work can involve the supervision in the defense of their subordinates vis-a-vis an overall boss or a challenge of Management's definition of work organization or work-rules. Either way VC/W results in a re-definition of work in

ways which take the humanity of the workers into consideration. The second, and contradictory implication, is that in moderating the primary relations of labour VC/W can undermine workers resistance to the intensification of their labour activities. These are two sides of a contradictory whole and while neither undermines the objective of production - the extraction of surplus labour-, they help us to understand the forms that politics of production take in the Refinery (see Ch.10). For the time being, I will illustrate, empirically, these contradictory aspects of the VC/W.

In October Akpobi, a process area Supervisor, had a protracted confrontation with the Area Superintendent -his own immediate boss- over an attempt to introduce a 3-3-1 shift roster. The system was being introduced by the Superintendent in an attempt to cover the staff shortage that would be caused by the departure of two Chief Operators on annual leave. The 3-3-1 system, unlike the normal shift, involves working a roster of 3 morning, 3 afternoon and 1 night shifts, without any rest period. This was to last for the two months of the chief operators' annual leave. While the Superintendent was compelled to allow the Chief Operators to commence their leaves,<sup>9</sup> the 3-3-1 shift system would allow him to do so without having to explain the staff shortage to Management. The implication for the other Operators, however, was two months of uninterrupted work, they complained to the Supervisor, who took up the issue. Akpobi's position was that it was unimaginable;

There's no way anybody can survive even a month of 3-3-1 shift, you say it as if you don't know what it is like to work shift... and supposed one of them 'trips',<sup>10</sup> then we'll have a major problem on our hands.

The Superintendent responded

Noo!, nobody will 'trip', there's nothing hard about this thing, they can do it... Look, if anyone feels he won't do it, let him put it on paper, pure and simple.

Akpobi stormed out of the office, and for a few days, the Chief Operators and the Boardmen thought they had to go through with the new roster. However, after days of

<sup>9</sup> The new regulation on annual leave was that any leave not utilized in a financial year, would be forfeited, and Falomo had ruled that everyone with outstanding leave should proceed before December. So the Superintendent was compelled to let the two Chief Operators go.

<sup>10</sup> This is an example of how technical terms enter the every-day language. 'Trip' refers to a technical breakdown or malfunction.



further 'slugging' it out, Akpobi finally got the Superintendent to upgrade some Operators to cover the gaps, and volunteered to act as backup personnel, himself, for the period.

There are many cases in which Foremen, in the Maintenance department or other areas have to stand up for their workers in the distribution of amenities; from lockers to safety wares. An Instrument section Foreman, spent days complaining to the Superintendent that "they're cheating my men again" over the allocation of new lockers, until he got a couple more for 'his men'. The most famous intervention in the Maintenance department -now part of the shopfloor folklore- is the case of a Mechanical Section Superintendent. The Corporation's management embarked on a certificate vetting operation. This involved checking the validity of the formal qualifications on which the employees were employed, which affected junior and intermediate staff. It created a panic among the mainly artisan workers in the department, and the Superintendent was reported to have insisted to the senior managers that, as far as he was concerned, the blokes were doing the job required of them and that was more than any certificate could do. Neither of the Unions resisted the move and at least a number of workers would have been fired (as had occurred previously) had the Superintendent not objected.

In some instances, this intervention could take the form of 'bending' the rules, as evident in the earlier discussion. The intervention, on behalf of subordinates is however not peculiar to the Refinery. In a case in Falomo for instance, Jasman, an Office Attendant, had accumulated a record of lateness and absenteeism. The Head of the Unit, where Jasman works, asked the immediate boss, Emman, a Senior Personnel Officer to issue a query. The problem had arisen from a series of domestic difficulties Jasman was having at the time; in addition he had to take care of two of his children who fell ill. He had told Emman the problem and the latter had actually been 'covering' for him. Now he had to obey his own boss, and yet take into consideration the circumstances of Jasman's case. After discussion with the other Personnel Officers, Emman decided to resolve the problem by helping Jasman draft his reply to the query which he issued. Emman, himself then had to evaluate if the reasons Jasman gave were acceptable. That way the boss would be satisfied and Jasman 'rescued'.

To test the extent to which such incidents were widespread, a statement: "My immediate boss will defend those under him, even to Management when he thinks they are right.", was put to the survey respondents. 70% agreed, to various degree<sup>11</sup> (N=243). The responses across departments varied. Only 52% of the respondents from the Auxiliary departments and 68.5% of those from Production agreed. This is against 70.5% of those from Maintenance, and 74% from Administration and 87.6% from Finance. By contrast however only 19.3%, of the total sample, disagreed in any way. This mean, however distorts the distribution, since except for the Auxiliary departments where those disagreeing were 44% of the sample, other departments registered 18.1% or less.<sup>12</sup> An important aspect of this manifestation of the VC/W is that in the absence of a powerful and combative shopfloor union protection, a Supervisor standing up for a worker may be the only thing preventing the worker from losing his/her job.

While the cases examined so far involve tinkering with the rules, the VC/W in some areas can lead to a re-organization of the work process. In the Truck Loading section, for instance, the sustained interaction between the Supervisor and the Operators has led to a re-adaptation of the work process. By 0900 the first truck would be at the loading bay. Between then and 1300 the speed of the operations is usually frenzied, with every single person in position. At the end of the period there would probably be a couple of tankers left to load. From then until closing time the change from the morning period is dramatic; it assumes a family atmosphere, banter, intense discussions, etc. When he was not joining in, the supervisory officer looked on with the air of a brooding hen. This arrangement contrasts sharply with the prescribed work pattern which expected the work to be stretched between 0900 and 1600. The unofficial lunch hour starts after 1300 instead of the normal time of between 1100 and 1300.

The extent to which shift work inhibits many workers from meeting their social obligations -e.g. attending family meetings, weddings, etc.- has been reduced in the most process areas by a process of unofficial arrangements. This involves two or more persons

<sup>11</sup> Appendix A(i), Q.22(12). I collapsed all the 'Agreed' and 'Disagree' options.

<sup>12</sup>  $\chi^2=62.95$ ,  $df=30$ , sig. at 0.004. The degree of association is however weak; Pearson's  $R=.026$ , Cramer's  $V=0.227$ .



who would arrange to swap shift periods; one covering for the period of other's absence. All such arrangements are made with the knowledge of the Supervisor. Most supervisors would however demand that the people involved in the deal put it in writing, in case one party reneged.

On the other hand, the VC/W can become the basis for the intensification of labour. The problem here is that because of the personal relation that has developed between the supervisor and the workers, the former can count on the respect or affection from his subordinates to limit dissent to his demand for greater work effort. In the Truck Loading area, mentioned earlier, the Operators had to work long hours and weekends to meet the demand for products in November. This followed the week-and-half strike of Tanker drivers in Warri. The Operators, however, never seemed to mind the extra hours of work, and as one of them told me, their boss was always 'on the level' with them. He always got their overtime claim forms through on time, etc; so they 'sort of owed him' a favour. In this sense they distinguished him from the uncomfortable side of the job they had to do, and perhaps the overtime pay would come in handy.

The constituency of VC/W could also be whipped-up to 'rouse' the workers. In December, the Instrument section was been geared up for their part of the work of putting the FCC unit on stream again. The Superintendent, generally reckoned to be a nice bloke, sent out a paper. He outlined the duties, the closing hours was now 'between 1900 and 2000 hours daily'. He ended with: 'I have no doubt in my mind that we belong to the group rightly described as "NUMBER ONE" and "TRAIL BLAZING" by our Chief Executive.' This sort of beloved-commander-calling-out-the-troops situation or image is only 'available' to a Supervisor or Superintendent who is seen by his subordinates as 'nice bloke'. In this instance the corporate collectivity also came into play.

It is important to note that in many cases being nice to the blokes is not necessarily at odds with being, at other times, 'as hard as nails'. In the survey of supervisory personnel in the refinery, I asked the question of preferred style of supervision. 54.2% thought being intimate but keeping the iron fist close was the most prudent and practical style of supervision. 22.9% of the total respondents preferred being distant but using the

kid glove and only 6.3% thought being distant and using the iron fist was the best option. Only 16.7% opted for intimacy and the kid glove (N=96).<sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein, the workers' survey reveals that 84.1%, of the respondents believe -with varied degree of emphasis- that their "immediate boss (Foreman, Chief Operator, etc) is a very nice person" (N=241).<sup>14</sup> 79.8%, gave similar response about their Supervisor (N=232). Odum, the Boilermaker supervisor is perhaps an epitome of intimacy and iron fist-style supervision; one moment jovial and sweating it out alongside the workers, and the next a raging, intimidating tower. One Boilermaker described him once;

He's a r-e-a-l bastard, but a nice one, sometimes.

On the other hand I asked whether they believe there was 'a danger of.. being victimized, if (they) "were outspoken against" a number of people including the supervisory personnel. In cases of 'immediate bosses', 30.9% said 'definitely yes', and another 30.9% said 'possibly yes'. Only 5.5% said 'definitely no' (N=236). In the case of supervisors, 27.7% said 'definitely yes', 29.4% said 'possibly yes', and only 6.9% said 'definitely no' (N=231). There is no significant relationship between department of the respondent and the response pattern.

On the whole, my assessment is that relations between workers and the first line supervisory officer, i.e Foremen or Chief Operators, are more intimate than with Supervisors or Superintendents. In the case of Boilermakers' unit, it is sometimes difficult to tell some of the foremen apart from the workers. The limit of the intimacy and empathy is when a supervisor felt anyone was challenging his 'authority', that is where the line is drawn. It reminds us that the relation is primarily a 'superior/subordinate' one, defined within the terms of hierarchical production relations. In reverse, this also limits the capacity of a supervisory officer, particularly Foremen and Chief Operators, to intervene on behalf of those under them. My own experience is that most would withdraw where their own necks would be on the line.

<sup>13</sup> Q.13. The Contingency Coefficient=0.39, with  $\chi^2=17.62$ . Level of education is the only category significantly related to the response pattern. Multiple Regression=.344,  $R^2=.118$ , which is by no means a strong relationship.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix A(i), Q.22(8). There is no significant relation with department Pearson's  $R=.129$ .



### 7.3. The Lateral Community and Work Relations.

The existence of shopfloor collective and work-group solidaristic action are issues that most branches of work studies recognize. This section looks into the articulation of LC/W, its dynamics and implications for the 'reconstitution' of life on the shopfloor. An important example of the forms the LC/W takes was evident on the afternoon of the last Saturday of November. About six Operators gathered inside a kiosk in the Process plant to discuss the finances of their thrift and credit cooperative body; on who still had outstanding loans to repay and how much, when the savings for the year would be collected from the bank, who would handle payment to members, etc. Two of them represent the adjoining process units and one representing members in the shift had stayed on after his morning shift. On the outside the rumbling and whistling of the plant continued. Douglass, the current chairman, had earlier in the year explained to me the nature and the reasons for setting up the Cooperative society. Each month members contributed a fixed amount, depending on the individual. At the end of the year the savings are handed over to contributors; in between, loans are advanced to members, without any interest charged. Non-members among process operators could also, on a member's recommendation, be given loans. As Douglass explained, "we are all the same, you know." It is important to take cognizance of both the ethos of this Cooperative and its wider social implication. Douglass gave his own experience as typical of the reason for setting the body up.

Almost two years previous, while preparing for his wedding, and all his savings committed, his mother fell ill. She was admitted to Bendel Clinic in Warri,<sup>15</sup> and he ended up with a bill of over 250 naira which had to be paid before she could even leave the clinic. He approached the bank next door to the refinery for an overdraft;

'a carry di hospital bill, carry my pay slip show dem. Na lie!. No gospel wey I naw preach dat day. Di manager naw gif' me face at all, 'e say 'e no'o gif' me anything.

I went with the hospital bill, my pay slip. No way!. There was nothing I didn't tell then. The (bank) manager turned it down; refused to give me anything.

Although he got a senior officer in the refinery's Accounts Office to intercede with the Bank Manager, on his behalf, it was such experience that led to the formation of

<sup>15</sup> The medicare program in NNPC only covers the employee and family-of-procreation.

the Cooperative among the Operators. The Cooperative -which is an independent body- represents a dimension of the collectivity in work and vital to an appreciation of shop-floor culture. Intricately woven into -and giving character to- the work process, we begin to grasp this complexity in examining the process itself.

### 7.3.1. Surviving the Work.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of the implications of LC/W, for work performance is in the collective effort to survive the work. Some aspects of this has been raised in Chapter 5, but here I will re-focus on the issues from the perspective of nature of the LC/W. As I earlier noted, the night shift begins to take its toll by the second night; the period between 0100 and 0300 being the most difficult stage. On many nights when the plant is not giving problems, the boredom could be severe, but when the plant is restless, the sound of the alarm or its anticipation could also be difficult to cope with. The regulations do not allow for music or 'non-operational' discussions but it is difficult to imagine people doing without them. In the MCR, surviving the night is a collective venture. The discussions; from politics to religion, marriage to technology, sometimes start very early. One or two persons may be the butt of jokes, which frequently shift in the choice of target. It could be someone with a noticeable bulging stomach doing minor exercises to remain awake, who would be dared to do 'touch his toe'. Tamuno's - a Boardman- cassette player, is integral to the whole effort, as is Sheke's comic act. Where sleep creeps in on an operator, the others (chief operator or boardman) almost instinctively take charge of everything. Across the Unit panels -especially where a particular unit is giving excessive problem in tripping-off-, the adjoining operators lend ears and eyes, in spite of it not being 'their problem'. Sometimes they take telephone messages or adjust the dials for a beleaguered boardman tackling another section of the panel; the chief operator would, in such instances, be busy inside the plant. An extension of this collective spirit is the non-existence of the dichotomy between the duties of the chief operator and the boardman -who is responsible for the panels- inside the Control Room, whatever the rule-book may say.



The nature of relations among plant operators follows a similar line. While the official job designations give the impression of unbridged demarcations -the Heater Operator with the Heater, the Pump Operator with the Pumps- situations where a Pump Operator can adequately operate and intervene around the heater in an emergency are not uncommon. Generally one operator looks (or listens) out for the next operator's equipment, and alerts the latter where there are changes in dial readings, sound or vibration. Even deep into the night shift, taking a nap has a collectivist dimension to it, as in the Control Room. Where two or three operators are on an adjoining stretch or share the same kiosk, one would commonly be awake and keep an eye on the other person's area, almost as an unconscious action. In a different way, it is not uncommon to find a young operator cuddled up on the stack turbine gang-way; a text book on his lap and cotton-wool in his ears - to keep away most of the roaring noise of the Ljungstrom. Many of them struggling to pass more O/level or A/level papers regularly depended on their colleagues to keep an ear open for them on the job.

The issues discussed so far, have two aspects; one involves the extent to which the workers rely on one another to get through the work. Kamata (1980) mentioned a similar process among Toyota's assembly line workers. While the process may sustain work performance there is a danger -political and analytical- of simply denouncing it as a collective 'voluntary servitude' (Burawoy 1979). The importance of my expatiating on the bases of the Cooperative becomes relevant here. A dismissive attitude will fail to grasp the ethos of the lateral collectivity which I will increasingly refer to as 'alternative morality'. This is because the LC/W is underlined by a moral rejection of the capitalist ethos of work organization and relations -see below & Ch.8. The collectivity represents attempts of people to re-assert their humanity in a context which takes them as objects of production. The second dimension, also clear so far but illustrated further below, is that 'adaptation to work' might in fact involve workers adapting the work to themselves. The case of the Operators catching up on their studies is an example.

The adaptation of work and the collectivist survival take other forms than the ones so far outlined. Among Boilermakers for example, the pacing of work usually involves unforced relay between individual members of a work-gang. Work on the FCC re-

actor plug valves is typical of this. The job involved removing the valves -lifted by a crane-, cleaning the inside and bolting it back. Each valve had over 15 bolts, each over 3 inches in diameter. To unscrew them, one person had to fix the spanner to the bolt, hold it while the another person hit the spanner with an non-spark hammer; the rust made it impossible to unscrew them with pneumatic instruments. The weight of the hammer easily took its toll on the wielder, and the person holding the spanner could get shocks from the vibration. But within the work-gang, which had no discernible leader, no one was left to spend too much time at either wielding the hammer or holding the spanner. Some other person after sometime would say; "you do well, oya bring 'am, go rest small" ["well done, now let me have it while you take a rest now"]. This is not limited to jobs in the plant. Someone doing a job in the workshop can also easily call out to someone standing by to lend a hand. The caller may have some words thrown at him in mock anger but would receive a hand anyway.

In a similar vein the collective ethos form the basis on which the older hands pass advice, on work survival, to the newer hands. No one in a work-gang expects you to throw yourself at a job, zealously. Take it in your stride would be the advice, in addition know how to survive the Supervisors. In Chapter 5, I cited Gladys' advice on when to show up in the workshop, but there are other aspects to it as Udu advised a number of us;

When di work hard like dis, you go,  
go call di foreman; make 'e come see  
'am. If 'e come, 'e see as 'e hard  
reach, 'e go go call supervisor, un-  
til 'e reach di top.

When the work gets this tough, get  
the foreman to have a look at it. If  
he comes and sees how tough it is,  
he'll call the supervisor, until it  
gets to the top.

Part of the folklore are cases of people who got enthusiastic and ended up getting the boot. In Instrument as in other parts of Maintenance, Isaac's warning about never taking on a job unless you have a signed work permit in your hands, is typical. If anything went wrong during the repair job. "deh go say na sabotage, say you be economic saboteur" ["they'll say its sabotage, that you're an economic saboteur..."]. In most part of the Refinery shopfloor folklore includes warnings about the danger of working in certain areas or jobs. About Otti for instance, who was always enthusiastic about the hard bit of the job, until he got his teeth knocked out by a swinging plug valve. And there are jokes and



back room humour, which form not only the basis of surviving the work but also the construction and articulation of community spirit on the shopfloor.

Among Process Plant Operators for instance, jokes, discussions and arguments may be forms of relieving the burden of the job, but they have other aspects as well. As in the CRs, it is varied and unpredictable who would be the next target of the jokes. For many of the new and younger operators it is a process of becoming part of the collective, the transmission of experience of the job, its hazards and how to survive it; in short, aspects of the construction of the communal ethos. Emeka, a young Trainee Operator, who was under six months in the refinery, was 'caught' in the joke once during a discussion of the effects of night shift on operators. Someone was using another operator as an example;

when di boy first come, son' two ye-  
ars ago, 'e fine well well, 'e jus'  
be like woman but now 'e don ol', 'e  
don wohwoh.

when the boy first came, two year  
ago, he was a beauty, pretty like a  
woman but now he's aged, he's beauty  
is fading.

Emeka commented;

Ewo!, na 'im be say me sef go come  
old quick quick so.

Blimey!, that means I'm going to age  
pretty fast too.

Geepe half jokingly said:

Oh, shu', you naw know?. You t'ink  
na like dis 'a old reach when a st-  
art. Small time now all dat ya face  
wey fresh so, go get wrinkles.

Oh, really, don't you know?. You  
think I was this aged when I arriv-  
ed. Pretty soon, your face which is  
so fresh now, will soon wrinkle.

Braimah another old hand said;

'E don begin dey get 'am sef'.

He's even started having it.

Across the plant, from the CRs to the process areas and maintenance, the one rule that I never saw violated throughout was snitching. No one snitches around here some might have said. There are instances in the Maintenance where a group or someone had shared the punishment or dressing-down for someone else's mistake. While the supervisor or superintendent was around nobody would squeal. Afterwards they probably would give the bloke some severe mouth-trashing. The problem during the tube cutting (mentioned at the end of last chapter) is a case. When the superintendent first stormed in, he kept asking "Who did it?, who is responsible for it?.", he threatened to dock everyone's pay for the cost of the tubes if we did not say who did it. I found everyone absolutely quiet about it,

and it was not for a week that we realised he was not going to carry out his threat. The important thing (to over-flog the point) is the need to recognize what the LC/W involves, as a distinct and autonomous collective ethos, which stands in sharp contrast to bourgeois individualist ethos.

### 7.3.2. Lateral Community and the reconstruction of relations.

A significant implication of the LC/W is that it becomes the basis for the reconstruction of social relations in a different sense. A current of social studies, in the African context, has always focused on the issue of ethnic plurality and the fissure that is taken as a necessary follow-up of a multi-ethnic environment. To a large extent, many work studies have taken ethnic fissure for granted; Ahiauzu (1983, 1984) being a more recent example. The Refinery workforce, as previously explained, is poly-ethnic, and the the process plant Shift B crew is in this sense typical. The control room crew had people from a wide spectrum of ethnic-nationalities: the northern, western, eastern and the riverine parts of Nigeria. This is also the case with the plant crew; Douglass's crew is predominantly Bendel in origin, but only three of the twelve spoke the same primary language: Urhobo. One would expect this ethnic heterogeneity to result in fissure and ethnic-based cliques.

However, relations within the crews were devoid of ethnic undertones. Although the ethnic identity is neither denied nor obliterated, its existence is acknowledged only in terms of differences in origin. The acknowledgment of the ethnic plurality in this case is analogous to the recognition of the multiple colours and shapes of the shells, stones and glass that go into a mosaic. The plurality does not necessarily lead to clique-formation. Let me explain. Douglass is an Edo like Edorkoh the boardman, but his relations with Edorkoh were hardly as strong as with Geepe and Braimah, who are from different ethnic groups. Bayo, another crew member, is from the same place as the Supervisor, but his allegiance to the crew members was not in question and no one assumed he would snitch on the group. More significant is the active discouragement of exclusion that seemed to be based on ethnic backgrounds. A couple of people speaking in their shared primary language over a length of time, could get hooting from others in the plant or the control



room of "e do" ("okay, pack it up"). Shared language or primordial origin is not as such the problem; it is when there is a hint that it would corrode the lateral collectivity that voices are raised.

In a number of instances, more than voices are raised. The message was conveyed harshly to a fresh PCD trainee who was with a Boilermaker crew working in the Kerosene Reformation section. Apparently he was not doing any specific work, but on the approach of the Head of Maintenance, he picked up a hammer and started working frantically. The Head was not only from the same place as the PCD trainee but helped him to get the job. A number of other people in the crew, aware of his relationship with the new Head, noticed his action. As soon as the Head left, an old boilermaker descended angrily on the fellow;

Oh, oh, na because ya broder dey come na'im make you carry hammer, begin dey do eye service? . Make 'a warn you; next time 'a go blow your head, you hear?.

Oh, oh, because your kinsman was coming is that why you started working, trying to impress him?. I'm warning you, if you repeat it, I'll knock your block off, is that clear?

The fellow had a rough period during the week, because almost immediately the word spread throughout the unit.

There is another dimension to the relationship between ethnic plurality and the LC/W which needs to be analyzed. Someone nearly missed the bus and a friend of his who was inside called out to the driver; 'a beg, stop o, Ette wan enter moto' ("please stop, Ette has to come on board). Ette, is a Kalabari word for 'brother', but often used as a joke name for those from the same ethnic group. In a different circumstance, jokes of this nature could be taken as highly offensive but within the workforce, among tight-knit collectives, it is simply an acknowledgement of their plural origin. A 'tourist researcher' might interpret this as evidence of ethnic fissure, but that would fail to explain why the very next minute the same people would be sticking out their necks for each other. In having jokes at someone's expense, it is not uncommon to hear cat-calls of "okoro man!" (reference to an Igbo person) or 'dis "ngbati ngbati" people sef' (a Yoruba person). While evident of the acknowledgment of ethnic plurality, the transfer of that into the basis of allegiance is actively subverted by the LC/W.

It could be argued that the subversion of ethnic cliques might be relevant to the workplace, but is not credible outside the factory gate. The after-work relationship between the members of Shift B does not however support such a response. More often than not for instance, if you went to Douglass's place and he was not in, he was most likely to be out with, or at the place of, the blokes in his shift crew. There is no doubt that the disruption of normal social life that shift work generates could explain the closeness of the group. They are probably the only ones whose work and leisure periods coincide, and there is no doubt that rest-days (particularly after the night-shift) unleash a raven appetite to catch-up on their social lives. This does not explain why they do it together. Beyond the dash for a rejuvenated social life is a more significant aspect of LC/W for general non-work life. When any of them was out of town, the others were expected to take care of the person's family, this is not limited to the group alone. When Opara, a technician was out of town and his younger brother -living with him- had Police problem, his wife turned to Frank, one of his work-mates for help; Frank simply assumed it as his personal responsibility.

It is therefore important to understand the nature of the LC/W as not something limited to the workplace. It is against this background that one appreciates its powerful implication for unionism, union struggles and non-union collective defense on the shopfloor. It is equally important to put the LC/W in perspective; its strength is also one of its major limitations. The LC/W is experientially rooted in the terrain of concrete labour activity and it easily generates a micro-segmentation of the workforce. For instance many on shift duties in the process areas may hardly know others, especially if they are in different areas. In Maintenance this is not a major problem since only a handful of the workers are on shift duties, and these normally interact with those on day work.

A more recurrent problem is the schism between clerical workers in the Administration division and plant workers, which sometimes takes the less antagonistic form of jocular chastising of clerical workers for their ignorance of the plant operation. Braimah once mentioned the case of a friend in Administration who asked him how long it would take for the oil well in the plant to run out. The more antagonistic aspect creeps in when



there are off handed references to 'people in the white house'. Among Maintenance workers there is a notion of absolute ineptitude among clerical workers, which could be because of unprocessed overtime pay claims, or similar problem. More generally it is the idea that because maintenance technicians in boilersuits are always covered in dirt and grease, they are always looked down upon by clerical staff. The fact that each case might not be easily substantiated did not deter such ideas.

## Conclusion.

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to demonstrate the varied aspects of social communities in work, raising other dimensions of wage-form value relations. Further reflection is however necessary.

The 'corporate collective' raises issues about an aspect of production relations (and workers experience of it), which is not simply one of commodity production or value realization. Even with commodity production as the criterion of the refinery operations or any other operational unit of NNPC, the relations of production are not simply defined in those terms. The attempt to touch the worker's 'soul and body', is also a constant aspect of capitalist relations (Stone 1975, Joyce 1980, Burawoy 1985). Braverman (1974) has rightly emphasized 'the habituation of the worker', and how this has become the purpose of a host of academic disciplines: from Industrial Psychology, to Industrial Relations. What is acknowledged is the duality of labour, which should also remind us of the workers' uneven experience of capitalism (vide Nichols & Armstrong 1976). The nature and the articulation of the corporate collective, will differ from one point to the other. In the case of NNPC, its centrality to the economy and its character as a unit of State-capital, form the bases of the ideological construction of the corporate collectivity. As I mentioned earlier, the ideological implications for the workers cannot be dismissed as a simple case of workers' self-mortification. This will be discussed further in the next Chapter.

The Vertical Community in work also means that even within a unit of capital or workplace, there is an uneven experience of production relations as well. I have mentioned my reservation of describing supervisory personnel as simple agents of capital, and I am not sure to what extent it is even valid to argue that the 'ambivalence' of Supervi-

sors -relative to their prescribed roles in production- is because of their declining power (cf. Hill 1973, 1976). By contrast, one needs to appreciate the duality of the performance of the global functions of capital and of the collective worker, that supervisory position involves.

What is clear in this study is that the collectivity which binds workers and some of their supervisory personnel together also derive from the previous collective struggles. Persistent interaction between the supervision and the workers also form the basis of the VC/W. An important element of the VC/W is that in a situation like NNPC, with no strong 'shop steward' tradition, the intervention of the supervisor could be the only thing preventing a worker from losing his job. Even if there was a strong and active shopfloor union, there are issues which are probably too insignificant or immediate for a union official to get involved in; e.g the alteration of shift schedule. Such issues might however be vital to the individual worker, and in these instances the supervisor might be the only person to talk to. I have cautioned against the idea that these are uncontradictory processes. A VC/W promotes patronage-dependence relation, without the power that a membership can wield on their union representative. It can also be the basis of work intensification.

The LC/W on the other hand, is perhaps the most significant in terms of workers' autonomous construction of identity and constituencies. I emphasized the extent to which the LC/W is underscored by a given moral disposition which flow into the pacing of work, the process of collective defense and the re-constitution of social relations. The pacing of work, and the whole process of surviving work cannot again be seen only in terms of workers' adaptation to work, since the work is also being adapted. As the fountainhead of collective defence and covert struggles in work, the LC/W is also being replenished and reinvigorated. This is demonstrated further in Chapter 8. In understanding the overall character of shopfloor life, it is important to see the LC/W as a terrain of cultural activities. In its folklore, it not only recognizes, but constructs (micro-)class identity.

The social community, as I have demonstrated, is not purely a result of the labour process. The VC/W and LC/W are in many aspects, products of non-work relations. They are however constituted in work (vide Willis 1980). In this way the cultural processes of



non-work context imbue the social relations on the shopfloor with its distinct flavour. Both the VC/W and LC/W are -as will subsequently become clear- vital for the non-union and union-based politics of production.

## Chapter 8.

### CONSCIOUSNESS, INTEREST ARTICULATION and RESISTANCE.

#### Introduction.

This chapter addresses two major issues; in section one, workers' consciousness and expression of what may be called working class interest, is discussed. The second issue which is discussed in section two explores how workers' perception of their location in production feeds into shopfloor resistance. The discussion of workers' consciousness examines the workers' ideas and self-perception from two positions: one advanced by Burawoy (1979), Edwards (1983, 1986) and others, insists on the 'relative autonomy' of the labour process in order to understand workers' consciousness. By contrast, Goldthorpe et al (1968) have argued for a procedure which approaches workers' consciousness in terms of extra-workplace processes and relations. As a continuation of the arguments made in the previous chapters, I will argue against seeing work and non-work aspects of workers' lives as two separate issues. In the sense, while emphasizing the significance of NNPC as a unit of state-capital for the ideological processes in the workplace, this must be seen in wider social terms. The emphasis is on the character of the Capital not a single labour process per se.

Secondly, that consciousness needs to be approached from the perspectives of workers' lived experiences, and as an outcome of the process of 'constitution of reality' (received wisdom) by the functionaries of capital and the state. That the contradictory elements of workers' consciousness is a result of these two processes, and the multi-layered nature of social relations. Workers cannot however be seen as passive recipients of other people's definition of the workers' experience, rather that their active engagement with their situations involves their autonomous construction of a collective identity and constituency. A principal element is what I call the 'Alternative Morality', which contrasts sharply with the capitalist ethos of the relations of production.



It is in the light of the above that we approach the everyday forms of workers' protests and oppositional activities on the shopfloor. We begin to tease out its significance when we locate their bases in the Lateral Community (vide Ch.7) and the Alternative Morality; which in Cabral's (1980a) words, become the 'cultural repositories' of worker resistance.

### 8.1. Relations of Production & Workers' Consciousness.

The discussion in this section is divided into two; in the first part, I examine workers' consciousness from the perspective of the organization of the labour process. In the second part, I focus on workers' perception of the distributional relations<sup>1</sup> in NNPC. Both discussions are guided by the exploration of the different sources of workers' perception and the explanation of the contradictory elements in their viewpoints.

#### 8.1.1. The Labour Process & Workers' Consciousness.

The discussion here focuses on both the organization of work and the articulation of an ideology of work. In outlining the complex sources of workers' consciousness, both the complex interpenetration of work and non-workplace sources and their contradictory effects are emphasized. The case of worker perception of work hazards and accidents is used to illustrate the extent to which people's experience of a phenomenon is not enough in accounting for their perception; one also has to take into consideration the received wisdom about the phenomenon, hence the idea of the (pre-)'constitution of reality'.

In Chapters 5 to 7, the workers' perceptions of the organization of work was raised. One of the main areas of contention derive from a moral contention over the consideration that the humanity of the worker should count in the direction of work. Such contention are of two kinds; one concerns the distinction between the work and non-work lives, and the second on the ways they are treated within the workplace itself. Both reveal a difference between the ethos of capitalist production and many of the workers' notions of what should be. As I explained in Chapter 7, it is not unusual to find a Supervisor or Foreman who takes a worker's personal/domestic problems into consideration in the

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'distributional relations' refers to relations of appropriation of social surplus (-value) as a determined outcome of the relations of production.

exercise of supervisory powers, but that is not always the case. In the first instance, the rate of performance of work or the level of attention to a job is believed by many of the workers as strongly affected by the pressure on the individual. For many workers, this should be taken into consideration. As a process operator puts it;

If you get problem wey dey worry you, so far 'e naw disturb work, deh naw worry. Person wey 'im pikin or wife sick for house, or 'im person die, deh expect may 'im work normally. 'A naw know how you fit forget son'tin wey dey prick you for mind.

If you have something worrying you, as long as it doesn't affect your work they don't care. You expect someone with an ill child or wife at home or who's just lost a close relative to work normally?. How do you simply forget a heart-break?.

In many instances the morality of the statement above usually calls for compassion, often drawing a line between the 'wicked superintendent' or supervisor and the nice one, and directing anger at the 'wicked' boss.

The moral disposition covers the whole spectrum of the labour activity. In the process areas, it revolves around the perennial work hazard and the treatment of the Operators. The notion of being treated as objects of production is vivid and underscores most of the oral expression of their position. As Geepe puts it "deh naw get regard for we", ["they have no consideration for us"]. The focus of this is the way in which their humanity counts for less vis-a-vis keeping production going. In Maintenance, accidents, the intensity of work and the inter-personal relations between workers and the supervising personnel are central to the forms of workers' perspective of themselves and their situation in the production process. As in the case of the Process Operators, it is in the disregard for their humanity that many find annoying. The experience of workers eased out of employment after they were disabled by accidents was what provoked Ufoma's angry allusion to an adage (reported in Ch.5); that they are treated, the way a farmer uses firewood.

This treatment of workers is often seen as inseparable from the work, but also as Management's insensitivity to their plight or an individual's style of supervision. Criticism and anger are usually directed against 'the Management' or the 'ogas' ['bosses']. A combination of the two is usually implied in the generic use of 'they', 'them' as against 'us' or 'we' that is prevalent in the idioms of the shopfloor; in a sense, a vivid 'us' versus 'them' perspective. These opinions represent alternative ideas on the direction and performance



of labour, however imprecise that alternative perspective is. The different forms of dissatisfaction may also remain in limbo and unstated.

The demand for a compassionate exercise of supervisory power is sometimes expressed in a religious conception of relations between human beings. Kenneth, a Water Treatment Boardman, complained during an interview about a Shift Supervisor giving a written warning -a very serious reprimand- to a plant operator found sleeping. Both Kenneth and the Supervisor are pentecostal christians and his position was that love and compassion are the basic christian ethics. He could not understand how someone who "calls himself a christian", could not put it into practice in understanding why the operator could not help falling asleep.

However, the above analysis and the alternative morality which defines some of the trends in shopfloor consciousness need qualifying. While there is a widespread rejection of being treated shabbily, the conception of production relations as capitalist is generally non-existent, which could primarily be a question of vocabulary. But then hierarchical relations are not ipso facto, seen as inherently illegitimate, neither is the factory system. To a large extent this derives from general social experience of the workers; often we have only known of hierarchical relation, and it seems to have been here since forever, so the assumption is that hierarchy must be the natural order of things!. To a significantly extent however, the legitimacy of the framework of production; the corporation, the Refinery, etc., is reinforced by the character of the unit of capital that employs their labour-power, i.e State-Capital. Ownership is obscure, the only recognizable 'owner' is 'government', but then the nature of instability of the State and those who are pre-eminent in it, makes it all the more amorphous. The frequent changes of political power in Nigeria, the unstable personnel composition of the various segments of the State, makes the minimal notion of 'State' imprecise in the public mind. The Corporation itself reflects this instability. Between 1980 and 1985 the Managing Directorship changed 5 times, and the Board of Directors, 3 times. Furthermore, the corporation is generally promoted as a national asset and essential to the national development effort. As I noted earlier, a number of the respondents to the survey of the workers in the plant, state their 'contribution to national development' as one of the things they like most about their

work. While the link between the workers' expenditure of labour-power and the petroleum products is obvious, the former's connection to 'national development' is not. It is grounded in NNPC's own self-image, and internal fostering of 'corporate collective'; but it does not mean a dissolution of the perceived inequality or of managerial power. 'Management', either in personal or collective terms is the 'them' from the shopfloor perspective.

The feeling that 'NNPC belongs to all of us', is complex in its implications. Firstly, it fosters the idea of a collectively owned unit of capital, underscoring the 'Corporate collective'. Secondly, it expresses the twinned basis of the basic reproduction of labour-power; the wage and the survival of the employing unit of Capital. As an Instrument technician puts it;

...ol' boy, dis na our farm, o.                      ...this is our farm, mate.

Beside the agrarian source of the analogy, it goes beyond simply making a living; the context in which it was expressed,<sup>2</sup> demonstrates the idea of the instruments of production as collective property, and a centre-piece of 'national development'. That itself does not mean, as I will demonstrate, that workers would not attempt to impose their own 'pacing of work'. The coherence of this notion of a collectively owned national asset, must be put within the context of the propagation of that position in NNPC's publications, the active promotion of the corporate collective (see Chapter 7), and the 'top-down' notion of team work, that is common in the refinery for instance. It does however meet the 'test' of being credible from the workers' experience of production itself, if partially so.

There is however a contradictory dimension to the issue. Because the corporation 'belongs to all of us'; it makes the demand for equal treatment, (or a respect for their humanity), all the more legitimate, and underscores the sense of incomprehension in a middle-aged Caustic Loader's query;

naw be gof'ment own di rifanery?,  
naw be gof'ment own we?, ...so, why  
deh dey do we like dis?.

the refinery belongs to the govern-  
ment, doesn't it?, we belong to the  
same government, don't we? ...so why  
do they treat us this way? [shabbi-  
ly].

<sup>2</sup> He was narrating the frenzied effort to put out a major fire-explosion in one of the process units in 1981.



Even the paternalistic notion of the relationship between governed and the governing for someone like Odafe -a man of peasant background- is partly a moral demand to be treated fairly, and as a human being first. It draws on a traditional image of political relations where a Chief was more of a father-figure for the community, and subject to the control of the community, rather than a pre-eminent monarch. Furthermore, the comment demonstrates how easily issues arising from the shopfloor can bring the State under fire.

The complaint about being driven too hard does not preclude the ethos of hard or conscientious work. In Maintenance where work is often physical, workers famous for hard work -without playing to the boss's gallery- are treated like folk heroes. Dodging your own bit within a work-gang is usually frowned upon -explained in terms of the extra workload imposed on other members of the gang. The important thing here is that the ethos is not explainable in terms of the labour process alone; this is no piece-rate work environment. If the payment or non-payment of overtime allowance affects workers' disposition to working extra hours, it will not explain the rate of labour-power expended during 'normal' hours or during unpaid overtime; neither would it explain the general ethos of work. One has to look beyond an 'autarkic' labour process.

Take the WAI campaign for instance (see Chapter 3), a great deal of the energy was directed at 'indiscipline' at work. The campaign on local and network electronic media ranged from jingles<sup>3</sup> to discussion programs or feature drama. Radio and Television stations also regularly carried 'public information' jingles telling people in employment to thank their stars -given the rise in unemployment- and justify their privilege by working hard, etc. A tele-drama series sponsored by the Ministry of Labour; had an old 'wise man' with long grey beard, popping in and out of workplaces from thin air. He pleads for industrial peace and higher productivity, and how these are essential for national survival. The form of the central figure is very significant in an environment where old people are treated with reverence, and respected for their wisdom.

Within the corporation many posters have appeared, since 'launching WAI'. There are some like the one asking: "ARE/YOU LATE TO WORK?/DO YOU LEAVE OFFICE/-

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<sup>3</sup> In one jingle someone sleeping at work was rebuked by a co-worker.

BEFORE CLOSING TIME?/ SEARCH YOUR CONSCIENCE/BE/A DISCIPLINE CITIZEN".

In many cases, the WAI campaign had been harnessed to deal with old problems,<sup>4</sup> as in the case of the wooden plaques in the Refinery, which read: "IT IS INDISCIPLINE TO WALK ON/ LAWNS. REMEMBER WAI" have been appearing. The subtle effect can be read from the way someone doing something considered illegal, like loafing or dozing is met with calls of "WAI, WAI". The WAI campaign is not being offered as the definitive ideology of work; its significance is in how it is situated within commonsensical, 'traditional' and the not so traditional work ideologies.<sup>5</sup> At the point of production, the campaign merges with the demand for 'honest', hard work.

The central issue about the different aspects of work ideology is that they do not spontaneously derive from the labour process or the workers themselves. Before the people are even old enough to become 'workers', they have had the ethos of hardwork drummed into their heads. Not infrequently, the linkage between poverty and laziness is drilled into their minds, and 'conscientious' expenditure of labour-power is what they are supposed to give in return for the benefit of their pay packets. The implications of all these in the daily process of production are not always dramatic. It is in the basic self doubts, nuances, comments and body gestures that their potency becomes evident. Consider taking a nap, for example. It is obvious to most workers that shift work puts them under immense pressure and logical that you can hardly avoid falling asleep, but there is a widely held ambivalence and self-doubt about it, it may be inevitable, but that does not justify it. A worker complaining about work load is cajoled with quotes from media jingles about how 'Nigeria, na we own' ['Nigeria, is ours'] and how we should all work hard to rescue it; to make it great. These are often expressed as humour, but it is in the daily arguments in the offices or the shopfloor that one appreciates how such jokes are tips of an uneven ingraining in the mind of the ideologies of work which the jingles make explicit. Although it is difficult to be precise about this, it is generally in those areas where the

<sup>4</sup> Total Oil, a private company, launched its WAI campaign with the theme: 'Patriotism Through Hardwork and Honesty'. The firm reminded its employees to 'Be Punctual At Work... Nigeria Is Our Country/ Strive For Excellence'!.

<sup>5</sup> Take for instance the poster in the office of the Refinery's Recruitment Officer, which read: 'A Man Who Counts His Hours/ In the Office and Shirks/ Responsibility But [sic] Kicks/ About His Pay is a Self-/Elected Failure./ Good Things May Come And/ Pass While the Artful/ Dodger Is In Hiding'.



LC/W is weak, that self-doubt about the morality of autonomous pacing of job ('effort restriction') is more prominent. Perhaps in the environment of strong group feelings, the LC/W itself give collective 'effort restriction', a legitimacy of its own.

The discussion above does not suggest an ideological hegemony of the ruling (or dominant) social bloc in Nigeria; if there is one thing it does not possess, it is a hegemonic position. That however would be viewing hegemony as absolute rather than fragmentary and partial in this aspect of social practice and not that.

### **The Ideological Construction of Work Hazards.**

As I explained earlier, the area of work hazards is one in which the potency of received wisdom is more vivid, and can be subjected to a more thorough analysis. The significance of the discussion below, is to illustrate the extent to which a vigorous ideological definition of a phenomenon can condition the perception of it. This situation exists ambiguously with a people's direct experiences. As I pointed out in Chapter 5, one thing that would impress a visitor to the plant is the array of safety notices, sign posts, etc. Vehicles entering the plant must have spark suppressors fixed to the exhaust pipes, smoking is permitted only in designated areas, cameras, lighters, etc are barred from the premises while all spanners and hammers in use are made of non-spark materials. The first thing a new employee learns in the Training School is about accidents and the main leaflet used in accident awareness training reads;

**Accidents do not happen by themselves, they are caused by something or someone. Accident and injuries may result from**

- (1) Improper attitude towards safety;**
- (2) Lack of safety knowledge;**
- (3) Failure to recognize unsafe conditions;**
- (4) Performance of unsafe acts. (underlined in original)[10]**

The onus of accidents is placed on the worker, a partial explanation which precludes faulty instruments or tools, inadequate safety shoes or clothing, health hazards, etc. It is an explanation that workers will meet recurrently and in the survey the issues of accidents and work safety were raised. The sampled workers were asked to give their as-

assessment on the statement: "Management does not pay enough attention to safety aspects of work in this place".<sup>6</sup> The result is in Table 8.1 below;

**TABLE 8.1.**  
**MANAGEMENT DON'T PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION TO SAFETY. (%)**

Departments	AGREE	AGREE SLIGHTLY	D/AGREE SLIGHTLY	DISAGREE	Row %
Administration	20.4	6.1	8.2	65.3	20.4
Finance	31.3	6.3	6.3	56.3	6.7
Auxiliary	16.0	16.0	8.0	60.0	10.4
Fire & Safety	16.7	0.0	0.0	83.3	7.5
Production	16.4	16.4	20.5	46.6	30.4
Maintenance	28.8	5.1	16.9	49.2	24.6
Column %	21.3	9.6	13.3	55.8	N=240

There are a number of qualifications to be made about the distribution pattern. In Maintenance, for example 41.2% of the sampled junior staff as against 24.4% of senior staff members agreed with the statement while in the Administrative section, 5% of senior staff as against 31% of junior staff agreed with the statement. In Production however there is no significant difference in the response pattern.

The flip-side of the onus of responsibility was also put to the respondents, i.e; "Most accidents are as a result of workers being careless". The pattern of response is Table 8.2 below;<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 8.2.**  
**ACCIDENTS ARE RESULTS OF WORKERS BEING CARELESS.(%)**

Department	AGREE	AGREE SLIGHTLY	D/AGREE SLIGHTLY	DISAGREE	Row %
Administration	26.1	21.7	15.7	37.0	20.3
Finance	38.5	30.8	15.4	15.4	5.7
Auxiliary	37.5	20.8	25.0	16.7	10.6
Fire & Safety	66.7	6.7	20.0	6.7	6.6
Production	23.9	23.9	25.4	26.8	31.3
Maintenance	36.2	24.1	15.5	24.1	25.6
Column %	32.6	22.5	19.8	25.1	N=227

Although I believe that results of a one-off survey should be treated with great caution and seen only as response at a point in time within a given context; however a number of things begin to unfold which capture the texture of shopfloor orientation and

<sup>6</sup> I have collapsed 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' to Agree and the 'Strongly Disagree' and the 'Disagree' in Disagree.  $\chi^2=24.91$ , Sig. at 0.051 with a Contingency Coefficient score of 0.306. Pearson's R=-0.105, sig. at 0.0517. Only 3.1% indicated 'Don't Know' (8), and 2.4% (6) did not give any response. These were removed.

<sup>7</sup> Pearson's R=0.007, and a Coefficient score of 0.27.



disposition to work related accidents. Although just under a third of the respondents think management's handling of safety issues is inadequate, over half blame workers for most of the accidents. The management's 'ideology of accident' (if one may call it that), is perhaps most prevalent in the Fire & Safety department. 70.1% of the total sampled workers believe management is probably doing enough, and over half blame workers for most accidents. Even in the clerical sections, where there is little direct experience of work hazard, almost half or more think workers are mostly responsible for accidents.

What is more significant is the responses from junior workers in Production and Maintenance, where most accidents are recorded and where the workers bear the brunt of the accidents. Although 47.1% of Maintenance junior workers disagree that accidents are largely their own fault, only 28.6% disagree in Production. 42.9% and 41.1% agree or agree slightly in Production and Maintenance, respectively. This captures a significant aspect of the trend on the shopfloor. Even a direct experience of a phenomenon like accidents is not enough to remove self doubt about accident in the face of management ideology of accident.

For many of the workers there is no doubt that an unsafe work environment is often to blame, but for others it is somewhat a foggy area, difficult to make total sense of. In interviews with some of the victims, there are scores of 'if's, and 'why me?'s. If Numa had been in a different work crew on the day he fell into a steam well, he might not have ended up with half of his body seriously burnt. If Emmanuel, a process worker, was splashed with hot crude, self-doubt is raised about what the scenario would have been had he not applied so much pressure in attempting to unblock the vent line. Sitting across from these workers you could feel their pain: in their voices, eyes and scares, in their search for explanation. Direct experience is here mediated by received wisdom from 'experts' whose notices and hand bills put the onus on them but also made more credible by a traditional cosmology in which fortune [ill or good] plays a significant part.

Geepe's case is an illustration of the latter: 26 years old, he has been working in the Vacuum unit for five years. For over three years he has been suffering from "heavy congestion in the chest" (which makes breathing difficult), "burning pain in the head" and

insomnia; he was found to be hypertensive<sup>8</sup> in September. Although he knows that during the turn around maintenance of the plant, he usually felt better, he knows somehow that the constant chemical releases around his work point are connected to his medical state, but his conviction is undermined by the fact that not everybody in his crew has the same set of medical problems as himself. His attendance at the plant clinic had not helped and he had to consult some traditional herbsmen. He once wondered aloud to me why these things were happening to him, and his fear that it might have occult sources led him in the first instance to consult the herbsmen, all to no avail. An important dimension of this for class or group consciousness is that while we live our lives as members of a collective; brought up and bred within that context, we often face the pains of life as individuals. And it is possible to feel lonely, even in a crowd.

Even where explanation can be precisely placed at the threshold of production process, dubious spare parts, or management indifference there is still a problem. They confront a power that outside collective mobilization seems so predominant; and specific knowledge of effect of chemical pollution, noise, work stress, etc is limited. Even where the knowledge is available how do you prove 20 parts per million (ppm) presence of hydrogen sulphide in the air at 5 p.m on a Saturday afternoon, instead of the 10ppm toxicity limit. As a process worker puts it;

...we know we're dying gradually, but what can we do about it?.

The frustration, bewilderment or anger remain even in the most apparently peaceful of days. These are often expressed in distributional terms, and it is to workers' views of the distributional relations that I will now turn.

### 8.1.2. Distributional Relations and Workers' consciousness.

Although for analytical reasons I have separated production and distributional relations, it is important to emphasize that the two are often inseparably expressed. For analytical reasons, distributional relations are separated into two broad parts, firstly, around the relations internal to the employing unit of capital, and secondly, those external to it.

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<sup>8</sup> The diagnosis was made in the Refinery Clinic.



For many of the plant workers, the difference between the image of NNPC as an oil company and the reality of the job, was only discovered after being on the job. The relationship between the job and the remuneration package on the one hand, and comparable appropriation of social surplus by management staff, expatriate firm and their European or American personnel, on the other hand are central to the workers' perception of the production relations. The idea of 'unfair deal' over junior/senior staff disparity in remuneration and benefits was reinforced in the junior workers' case by the collapse of their union's strike in 1983 (see Ch. 9 & 10). The strike was embarked upon to narrow the disparity in staff benefits in the first instance. The depth of the sense of inequality among many plant workers was expressed by a worker, with reference to apartheid.

There was a sustained struggle against the discriminatory practices under Snamprogetti's management (see Chs.4 to 7), both the levels of personal relations and allocation of facilities. The exit of the Snamprogetti personnel did not alter the overall character of relations; except that the positions, the cars and the company residences, have now been taken over by Nigerians. The word 'apartheid' in the plant, denotes both forms of inequality; one foreign and largely racial, the other indigenous and class. Within the Plant, it is often expressed in the sense of the sharp differences in the environment in which Plant workers work vis-a-vis the management personnel. In rain and sunshine for instance, a process worker is expected to remain by the instruments. Before kiosks-shelters were provided in 1982, all that stood between the operator and the tropical rain would be the plastic raincoat and an overhead or standing structure. This contrasts with the comfort of a typical supervisor or management staff, air-conditioned office accommodation, away from all the noise, the heat and the pollution. In response to the Nigerian tabloid image of oil workers as 'affluent', a process operator noted; people are entitled to their opinions,

but we wey dey insie' know say na we dey suffer'am Di people wey dey enjoy, who dey chop'am, deh know dem-sefs... Di engineer wey work for plant once in a while, dey go back 'im office, go siddon for cool air but we wey dey work for plant, na here we dey, wey we dey suffer.

but those of us who're here know it's anguish. The people who enjoy it, who are enjoying the nice parts know themselves... An Engineer who works in the plant once a in while will go back to the comfort of his air-conditioned office, but those of us who work inside the plant, remain here with all its pain...

As another one puts it, it's 'suffering an' smiling'.<sup>9</sup> The feeling of unequal distributional relations is particularly acute among plant workers, given the sharp differential in pay and benefits. For the senior/middle management, there are the provisions of housing, defrayed domestic bills, company cars, etc.

In the survey the respondents were asked: 'For the work you do, the volume of work, hours of work etc, how would you rate your financial remuneration i.e. your total pay.?'. The response pattern is in Table 8.3, below;<sup>10</sup>

TABLE 8.3. WORK-PAY COMPARABILITY. (%)					
Department	UNDERPAID & IT'S UNFAIR	UNDERPAID BUT DON'T MIND	PARITY	OVERPAID	Row %
Administration	25.0	29.2	45.8	0.0	20.6
Finance	35.7	42.9	21.4	0.0	6.0
Auxiliary	45.8	20.8	33.3	0.0	10.3
Fire & Safety	55.6	16.7	27.8	0.0	7.7
Production	58.6	22.9	18.6	0.0	30.0
Maintenance	49.2	25.4	22.0	3.4	25.3
Column %	46.4	25.3	27.5	0.9	N=233

In a number of departments there are significant differences between junior and senior staff workers. For instance, 85.7% of junior workers in Fire & Safety department as against 36.4% of senior staff workers in the department, believe they are underpaid and find it unfair. In Production and Maintenance the differences are statistically insignificant. The reasons for some respondents' choice of 'underpaid, but don't mind', is difficult to pin down precisely. A possible explanation, for some, may be fatalism. As a respondent wrote; 'there is nothing I can do if I let it bother me.'

However, it is the magnitude and not pay differential itself, that is seen as illegitimate. This usually relates to what is sometimes seen as the 'unethical' appropriation of internal resources. The Corporation would for instance spend between 6,000 and 7,000 naira providing a residential accommodation for a General Manager in Lagos which is against 50 or 70 naira paid to a junior worker as housing allowance. Sometimes it is seen in terms of the difference between the opulence of the housing complex in Warri or the

<sup>9</sup> 'Suffering an' smiling' was popularized by the Nigerian Afro-beat musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. It was used in a song to denounce the appalling living conditions and the state of public utilities, among the Nigerian subordinate classes. The 'smiling' does not suggest elation; only the inability to overturn one's domination.

<sup>10</sup>  $\chi^2=39.95$ , Sig. at 0.029, Pearson's R=-0.19.



Ikoyi accommodation in Lagos for management staff, vis-a-vis the squalor of the residential areas of the average worker in Lagos or Warri. The image of the corporation as a national asset, provides the legitimacy for a moral indictment as evident in a discussion among some Drivers and maintenance workers over the use of the refinery vehicles by the management personnel and their families;

deh dey wicked NNPC o, [the driver] go carry madam\* go market, leave di A/C on, na so 'e go dey till madam come; if di madam go market come and di moto dey hot, 'e go vess. Wetin driver go do, naw be to leave the A/C so.

they're callous to NNPC, [the driver] will drive 'madam' to the market and has to leave the car's air-conditioner on until, she returned from her shopping; if she got back and the car interior was hot, she'd get crossed. What do you expect the driver to do but leave the A/C on.

[\* a generic term for the boss's wife.]

As one of the discussants noted, they (the management personnel) know car batteries are always available in the warehouse, so why should they care. While presented in moral terms, it nonetheless reinforces the 'us' and 'them' feelings, the implication is a moral subversion of 'managerial authority'.

#### **The 'Poor Man' Worker: issues in self-perception.**

In contrast to typifying top or middle management persons as "big men" [the rich or the powerful], a self-definition as 'poor people' or 'poor men' is common, particularly among junior workers; very often 'poor man' and 'worker' are used inter-changeably. When for instance Douglass, a process worker, described how he secured a bank overdraft only after the intervention of a senior Accounts department personnel, Geepe's comment, was;

You see now, na big man dey get mouth for big man o, which side poor man go get help?. You see dat?.

See that?, the 'big' people only help one another, who'll give [us] poor folks help?. You see that?.

This is not an untypical comment, both workplace and larger societal inequalities are expressed largely in this way. One is sometimes seen as an extension of the other, and this is not strange. Many of the workers live in shanty towns, the semi-slums of the urban areas, many are also children of peasant, semi-proletarian, artisan or working class parents. In the residential areas of Warri, there are no exclusive working class neighbourhoods, whatever the disadvantages or social deprivation they experience, they do so as part of the larger, composite, subordinate classes (urban or rural). In some instances,

some of them may even be 'better off' (income wise, more educated) than many of their neighbours. But they are in their daily social relations, recreational activities, domestic lives, part of the larger collective, generically referred to in pidgin english as 'poor people'. In many instances they share sets of opinions and dispositions of a larger subordinate bloc. The absence of self-identification as "working class" makes sense within the larger social context. Class identity is in addition made, for many workers, more obscure by national, regional and religious identities, but that does not mean it is absent. The 'poor man' as against 'big men', parallel image of poverty that categories like 'talakawa' or 'mekunnu', embody in Hausa and Yoruba languages respectively, which put in descriptive categories class differences and interest.

It is within this framework (i.e beyond the workplace) that one can understand some aspects of the workers' perception of larger distributional and power relations. The 'earthy suspicion' of those in political power is matched by a mistrust of hard work being the source of personal wealth. Even in this instance, the notion that 'poverty na [is a] curse', was widely expressed; a curse in the sense of misfortune, something you should avoid if you could. But this does not itself mean poverty, unequal distribution of power or wealth are taken for granted. Confronting the virulent appropriative ethos of capitalism is sometimes an imprecise collectivist ethos.

This 'collectivist ethos' transcend the workplace collectivity in its expression, and at the same time flow from a distinct sense of compassion for other members of the subordinate classes ('poor people') like themselves. This is well illustrated during a discussion of the Operators' evaluation of the pay and condition in NNPC. First, Emeka complained bitterly about the unequal distributional relations within the corporation and the non-responsiveness of the management to the workers' demands. Efe, who had been sitting quietly for sometime, intervened;

my friend, some people dey outside wey naw get work, you, you dey complain. Even some wey get like Deawoo workers, dey suffer bad bad. Abi deh naw be human being?.

Look, mate, there're many outside there who are unemployed, and you're complaining. Even some like those working for Deawoo are getting a raw deal. Aren't they human beings?.

Efe's opinion was not made from a pro-management stance, rather it was from a disposition of compassion for other groups of dis-advantaged groups, by no means occupationally



related to them. This derives from the intimacy with many unemployed workers -the feeling that Refinery's workers' are relatively better-off than others with whom they share residential neighbourhood or social lives.

There is however a second dimension to Efe's comments. Before his intervention, Emeka's position was the dominant perspective, but afterwards Efe's position was taken on board by the other Operators. This was in spite of the consensus about the inequality within the corporation, but this was modified by Efe's comment. As with most other daily arguments and discussions in the refinery, one sees a ceaseless process of formation of ideas; of a collective 'production of knowledge' (a la Althusser). The workers in other words are not just made, ideologically, but are also involved in the process of creation. This process of cultural production is an outcome of discursive intercourse among the workers themselves. To a significant extent, this process is not only sustained by the Lateral Community, but forms the basis for its (LC/W's) regeneration. The discursive process however transcends any exclusion of work from non-work. It involves a processual and collective integration of their experience and perspectives. The workplace does not exist as space of social existence, independent of their lives outside the factory gate. The discursive process is however not limited to shopfloor relations alone, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 9, it is a vital process at Union meetings.

I have, in these two sections, discussed workers' consciousness in general terms rather than in the sociological tradition of typology-building, which is deliberate. It is of course possible to identify individuals with 'radical' or 'conservative' views on this or that issue. One can also identify people who consciously reject their subordination and others who take their domination for granted, or even see it as the natural state of things. But it is difficult to build a typology of consciousness into which individuals or groups could be slotted. It would miss the nature of relations among workers and the ways in which opinions are formed, contested, altered, retained or radically changed. Perhaps a more affirmative evidence of group relations of this type and 'orientation' is in the practice of shopfloor interest articulation and resistance, and it is to this issue that I now turn.

## 8.2. Interest Articulation & Shopfloor Resistance.

In Chapter 7 I discussed the nature of shopfloor collectives and ways in which they involve not only 'socialization' into work-groups, but actively reinforce the spirit of collectivity among work-groups. Within the framework of expressing and giving form (articulation) to these group (or class or intra-class) interests within the workplace, workers' consciousness is formed and actively sustained within the Lateral Communities. They represent forms of autonomous shopfloor culture and the terrain of the social reproduction of work-groups. We begin to comprehend oppositional activities, protests and other forms of worker resistance as rooted in the community and as expressions of autonomous interests. The distinction between concepts I am employing needs clarifying here. By 'oppositional activities', I refer to the 'instinctive' reaction of workers to the condition of labour activities. They are perhaps what in the literature are referred to as "non-directed conflict" (Edwards & Scullion 1982:12), they are often rooted in the 'pursuit of autonomy' (Weir 1973); a dimension of shopfloor culture. As shopfloor cultural activities (vide Cabral 1980a), they derive from a conception of production relations which stand -if embryonic (Gramsci 1971:327)- in opposition to capital's organization of the labour process. 'Protest activities' on the other hand, have deliberate and focused direction of anger or frustration, they might be overt or covert (van Onselen 1976, Cohen 1980). Oppositional activities when confronted by supervisory/managerial intervention in shopfloor culture (lateral community, for instance), may burst open into protest activities. Both represent, to a great degree, forms of workplace resistance.

For the present discussion I will focus mainly on workers' 'pursuit of autonomy' to demonstrate the nature and forms of protest or oppositional activities. There is no assumption of deliberate or conscious activism and the focus can be briefly stated: first, protest activities directed at the organization of the labour process; second, protest activities involving the rejection of 'over zealous' supervisory direction of labour activity; finally, protest activities organized around the distributional relations. Some forms of protest or oppositional activity, do involve more than one focus.



### 8.2.1. The Pursuit of Autonomy.

In the process of work itself, the organization and direction of work are often the focus of resentment, which are confronted with attempts to assert autonomous direction of work. In Maintenance, where the direction of work involves direct supervision, workers reaction to this form of work organization and direction has been an extensive shop-floor practice of autonomous control of work. In a situation where the work is tedious and physical, self-pacing is both a rejection of work direction and a mode of surviving the work. In a work-gang, for instance, when a job is being done in the plant and problem arises, there are two ways of handling it. If it was close to the break period, as Gladys advised (see Ch. 5.3.3) the best thing was to hang around in the Plant until the break period, rather than hurry back to the workshop. After the break period you could then report the problem to your Foreman. Alternately, if it was an urgent job and you were having difficulties, one could take Udu's advise, and rope-in the hierarchy, until they find a solution (see Ch. 7.3.1). As he interjected;

Shu!, na me go come die?.

Boy!, you think I'll break my back  
(for them)?.

The practices expressed in Gladys' and Udu's advice are conscious efforts to avoid excessive labour, and in Udu's case the idea is to buy time while the 'bosses' are sorting out the problem. There is no guarantee of success in the latter, and in this case, it back-fired. The Superintendent was breathing so hard down the neck of the Foreman that as soon as the difficulty was reported, instant action to solve the hitch commenced: we ended up closing two hours late. The use of the official procedure, may have more to do with oppositional activity rather than signaling an act of protest, which is also the case when people are 'giving themselves a break'. In other instances however, the use of procedure represent a clear cut protest activity. The rules for undertaking repair jobs involve, as explained in Chapter 5, obtaining duly signed work permits. In a case or two, some technicians had lost their jobs for doing urgent repair jobs (which went wrong) before the work permits were issued. The reaction of the technicians had since been to refuse to do any job unless all the correct papers pertaining to it had been duly signed. As a form protest, such refusal also has an element of self preservation to it. The incidences

of Boilermakers opting for the dirtier (and often harder) work in the Plant, should also be seen as acts of protest: as someone notes '... you no'o get dem (won't have them) breathing down your neck'.

Generally across the departments, effort restriction is usually linked with over zealous supervision or the unequal distributional relations, the latter is not just in terms of internal relations, but the amount paid to expatriate workers on contract work. During a maintenance assignment in the plant, at the same time as some expatriate technicians were repairing a Reactor, one of the workers commented;

You see dose people?, na dem dey enjoy. Na di Americans bi dat... Five hun-dre-d naira\* per day, free house, free motor, na wa o. And how much deh dey pay we?, eh?. A beg may we do di work small small.

See those people?, they're the people benefiting. They are the Americans... Five hun-dre-d naira per day, free accommodation, free cars, incredible!. And how much are we paid, eh?, Please, go easy on the job, mates.

[\* exchange rate was \$1.5 to 1 naira]

There is another dimension to linkage of effort restriction to remuneration: whereas junior staff are entitled to overtime pay, senior staff personnel are not. In Maintenance, most workers on the first two steps senior staff grade are either promoted from junior staff ranks or newly recruited polytechnic graduates. The ex-junior workers automatically lose their entitlement to overtime pay. In the case of the newly recruited, they do not received any overtime pay, although they regularly work extra hours alongside their junior staff colleagues who receive the payment. Not unusually, jobs that could be finished in a day or two may drag on for extra days. As an Instrument technician explained;

if you're disturbing my own life (with overtime work) and I know at the end of the month I will get something in return, I will do the work well. But you don't and you expect me to work well?. Huh!..

In the cases cited so far, the basis of effort restriction is in reaction to unpaid or underpaid labour, or overt supervisory control of labour-power expenditure. But in a number of instances, the inhibition of creative power produces oppositional activities which take the form of 'psychological' distancing from the work. Doing the 'minimal' and letting 'the devil take care of the rest'.



The oppositional and protest actions of labour restriction discussed so far often occur within the context of the group, but do not necessarily involve the group, as a unit. A more subtle but pervasive 'pursuit of autonomy' is tightly organized around the lateral community, whose very existence, as I explained (Ch. 7) represents a distinct 'conception of the world'. The forms and ethos of the LC/W involve subtle rejection of and redefinition of work rules by the workers, and attempts to adapt the work environment to themselves. By themselves, they are distinct 'cultural actions'; efforts at 'surviving the work'. In most departments, particularly the process and maintenance areas, the shopfloor community is the basis of collective defence against supervisory/managerial attempts to impose discipline or alter shopfloor practices. The withdrawal of support is often used against Supervisors, notorious for being bossy or who refuse to take advice from subordinates. In a case in the production area, a couple of operators pretended they had no inkling of resolving a problem to a Supervisor, during an instrument breakdown. As one of the operators explained;

if you tell dem say na so 'e be, deh go say you wan' teach dem di work, so you go dey look dem may deh find di answer for demse'f.	if you tell them, this is the way to do it they'll say you're playing smart, so you leave them to sort it out by themselves.
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In a couple of cases in Maintenance, it involved keeping quiet and following the supervisory personnel's every instruction.

The shopfloor collective also provides the basis for what may be called acts of 'civil disobedience'. In a case in the process area, the supervisor passed down the notice that Operator found inside the kiosks provided in the plant, unless it was raining, would be reprimanded. Within minutes of the resumption of a new shift crew, a counter instruction to disregard the supervisor's instruction was passed out by the crew's Area Operator -very much the Supervisor's junior. The Area Operator, although by no means the oldest in the crew, doubles as the 'father-figure' for the crew members, and the last instruction stuck. As one of the crew members said, the supervisor would have to come into the plant and enforce the new rule, wouldn't he?. If this represents 'covert' resistance, a more overt act of civil disobedience occurred in 1981. Annually, new pairs of safety boots are issued; this time rather than leather safety boots, plastic-based ones were distributed,

which in the greasy and hot areas of the plant were quite uncomfortable to use. A number of people from different shifts got together and sent instructions round for all the boots to be returned to the warehouse, while writing a protest letter to the Management. Although in its first year of existence in the refinery, the action did not involve the Union. By the following day, many Operators were depositing their boots at the warehouse and they got the management to change the boots.

An individual explosion of anger, involving direct physical attacks on supervisory personnel is a rare but obvious act of resistance. In a number of cases, it is a product of resentment against zealous supervisory direction of work, a violent expression of desire for autonomy. Otti, a Boilermaker, is famous among his colleagues as something of a maverick, squaring up to a number of Foremen and Supervisors; but he is by no means the only one. Ralley, a British employee of Comerint, the Anglo-Italian firm which ran the Training School, had a bad reputation for getting on the back of the Nigerian personnel working under him; that was before he almost got carved-up by Osidor, a clerical worker in the school. The morning of the incident Osidor was reported to have stopped at a chain of stalls at the Jeddo-Refinery junction, just a hundred metres from the plant. Here local alcoholic beverages are sold over the counter, and marijuana is believed on sale under the counter. Osidor reportedly took some shots of gin, chased down with some sticks of marijuana and armed with a carving knife, he headed for Ralley's office. Although he was able to get in, Ralley was not alone in the office, and in the ensuing scuffle the latter bolted out of the office. It took, as the narrative went, four security men, a number of injuries, and several hours to disarm Osidor. He lost his job for it, but -as in Otti's case- became something of a shopfloor folk hero.

Such individual acts thus acquire a collective dimension. They not only express shared resentment, but they play out what a number of others would have loved to do, but might not have the courage or the capacity to put everything on the line, which such actions require. To the outside world, these individual acts may be lunatic, to their peers, they are heroic. Osidor's use of drug and alcohol, is most probably not the first time. In this case, use of drugs to muster-up courage, connects directly with a desire to hit out at a perceived source of domination rather than acquiesce (vide Cohen 1980); Ralley, it is



stated, became less abrasive. More mundane outbursts, often no more than verbal, are the lesser versions of the physical attacks, but carry some similarity in terms of individual attempt to confront a source of anguish.

A more insidious dimension of 'lashing out' is the claim of occult attacks or threats against individuals. The problem in an analysis of these cases is that it is difficult to know when a threat is mere bluff and when it is real, or when the connection between different or related incidents are only in the imagination of the individual who thinks s/he is a target. But to the extent that they are real in their effects, they are significant as forms of resistance. The most famous case is that of a Discipline Officer in the Personnel Office. As a number of his colleagues said, he was extremely eager -perhaps a trifle callous- in his execution of his post,<sup>11</sup> acquiring extreme notoriety. The crisis, for him started, when he issued letters of termination of appointment to a group of workers, in which a couple of them promised him a small experience of hell on earth. Within weeks he had a series of motor accidents, and within three months lost two children and his wife in a car accident. As another Personnel Officer puts it;

dey wire'am, real bad, naw bi  
small...

they dealt with him horribly, it was  
no joke..

The point is not the validity of occult attacks, everyone, including himself, believed he was a victim of revenge and subsequently asked for transfer from the post. The person who took over as Discipline Officer, only did so after a change in the discipline procedure. Now the officer acts only as a conduit: the person initiating disciplinary action would have to put his/her name to the paper and this made clear to the person being disciplined. In the process areas for instance, an Operator explained that a couple of supervisory personnel had to be 'threatened with death', before they stopped bothering them. It is important to stress the rarity of these incidents, they however become effective in the fact that someone believes s/he is at a risk if s/he does not play fair.

But more jovial ways of squaring up to a Supervisor or Foreman in Maintenance in particular, is to give a zealous Foreman a run around by invoking his authority. This is

<sup>11</sup> The situation was made worse for him, because at the time, a superior recommending a subordinate for reprimand did not have to append his/her name to the query form. The worker might not even know the source of the recommendation.

different stonewalling a supervisor by suggesting "you're the boss" and withholding support. Ade was a newly employed Boilermaker but was made Foreman immediately on grounds of academic qualification. His enthusiastic execution of his post brought him in conflict with those in his work-gang and they decided to give him a little run around during a repair job in plant. The normal procedure is for the leader of the work-gang to collect tools needed for a job in the Material Issue unit (MIU), this requires knowing which instruments to ask for. When they got to the job, the sets of spanners collected by the Foreman did not fit the bolts, which meant returning to the MIU. Normally, it is the most junior member of the work gang who would do this, but the workers told him that as the gang leader he had to collect it. It meant clambering down and up series of metal stairs from the landing on which the work was being done. But even at this stage, the folks gave him the wrong spanner sizes. He clambered down, went to the MIU collected the spanner, clambered up again only to find out that the spanners would not fit, again the workers insisted he had to collect the right spanners. By the time he came back and the job was finished, he was so furious he asked the unit Supervisor -himself a mischievous bloke- if as a Foreman, he had the right to issue the gang members a query. For what?, the supervisor asked; there was no definable offence. The incident is still a standard joke item in the unit, and Ade still licks the wound.

The use of cartoons, is also one of the non-physical forms of protest in the Refinery and two cases may suffice. In mid-1984, the Industrial Arbitration Panel to which the 1983 industrial dispute was referred, threw out the Union's (NUPENG) claim for comparable adjustment in fringe benefit allowances. The whole case was lost, for the moment. Within weeks, the photostat copies of a cartoon with different animals arranged in a stack, one group over the other were pasted around the plant. Across from the animals on top of the stack was written 'Management', with a list of allowances and benefits in housing, official cars, etc, which they enjoy. Under was a set of other animals, with "Senior staff", and the amount in fringe benefits written. At the bottom of the pile were others, labelled "Junior staff", again with the list of benefits. The caption was simply "God dey", which is more like saying 'God is the final judge'.



In the second case, the Management in Lagos, at the end of October, imposed a ban on overtime pay; for many junior workers in the Maintenance department, it meant a sharp reduction in total pay. By the following Monday morning, copies of a cartoon (Appendix J) announcing the death of 'Mr Overtime' were appearing on notice boards. It listed the 'surviving children' as 'Foodstuff 1st Son (Sick)', 'House-Rent 1st Daughter (On Hospital Admi[ssion])', 'Taxi, 2nd Son (Homeless) and all other sons and daughters [in] exile. Burial takes place on Saturdays'. Again as individual acts -one needs the drawing skill, anyway- they are expressions of collective grievances, and there is in fact the high probability of joint effort in designing, photocopying and distributing them.

### Conclusion.

This chapter has been concerned with the issues of ideology, workers' consciousness and shopfloor resistance. As an element in the overall project of this work, I have been concerned to stress here issues of the politics of production which occur without union involvement or the formal institutions of Industrial Relations. The discussion has evolved without directly engaging with the literature, but it is important to do that at this stage. There can be little doubt that a disregard for the experience of the working class or other dominated classes, immanent in Althusserian marxism- creates problems for a viable understanding of consciousness. I have tried here, to show the ways in which experiential interaction with the world is important in the forging and construction of distinct identity. At the same time experience means confronting social reality in its contradictory forms, experiencing a phenomenon does not therefore exist in a vacuum. This process often takes place within the framework(s) of ideological constitution of 'reality'. I have used two instances to illustrate this; accidents and work ethics and use the WAI campaign to illustrate the issue of work ethics. The significance of the campaign is not that it articulates a 'dominant ideology', but in the ways it exploits 'traditional' ethos of work and societal discipline and commonsensical notions of national survival, etc. This was then picked up by companies to reinforce internal production relations.

The campaign at the national level, raised not just questions of work ethics but of sanitation, political accountability and corruption. These are issues that have arisen from

class, nationality or other group conflicts. The campaign therefore, in many instances, reinforced the non-hegemonic position of the (various fractions of the) dominant class or bloc. As an example of the ideological efforts to hegemonize the State, the fragmentary and incoherence of the campaign, reflect the difficulty of attempting to argue the idea of a 'dominant ideology'. Nonetheless, to argue as did Abercrombie et al (1980), that the control of the dominated classes (working class, in particular) relies on 'economic relationships, integrative effects of the division of labour, [and] the coercive nature of law and politics' (p.6), poses a lot of problems. It does not begin to comprehend how and why hierarchy and the fundamental relations of productions for example, are taken for granted; or even the very constitution of workers as 'workers'. The problem here is to define the 'dominant ideology' as some form of Magna Carta -all written and bound up-. But the very essence of ideological domination is in the moral tone that is set, about work and wages, the concept of a nation and what is 'ours' as a people, either ethnic or national. It is in the self-doubts that are generated in people's mind, that one begins to understand the dimensions of ideological domination.

As also demonstrated, the construction of a distinct consciousness is rooted in social contradictions. Between experience and what the dominating ideology(ies) suggest; it is often a fledgeling attempt to make sense of reality and constituted in the process of social relations. Here a number of significant issues need raising. I have demonstrated the limitation of assuming a 'relative autonomy' of the labour process (Burawoy 1979, Edwards 1983,1986), but equally that ideas are not just imported into the workplace (Goldthorpe, et al 1968). The terrain of production process involve a reconstitution of non-work social relations (Willis 1980). Here we also find the ways in which work and non-workplace relations are bound up in workers' self-awareness and consciousness. The issue of self-identity (as with other dimensions of workers' consciousness) are rooted in specific cultural and experiential context. The importance of this is not to argue on whether or not this is necessarily class consciousness, because this begs the issue, and rests on an assumption that there is pure class consciousness. The important thing is that consciousness is a process of constitution, with definitive socio-cultural context. A working class's self definition as 'poor people' is no less evaluative than another's self-definition as 'working



class'. An assumption that class relations are in pure forms is at the root of the search for workers' action that is definitively and 'purely' class in character. 'Language', as Gray notes, needs to be seen 'as actively constitutive of social identities and bases of political mobilization.'(1986:365).

Both in the residential areas and in the workplace, a process of social constitution of forging identities is involved, but no assumption need be made that this is only (or must have definitive) class character. Peace's (1979) study of a residential area in Agege, just outside Lagos, reveals the extent to which such neighbourhood collectivity is supportive of workers struggles; and the ways in which the latter are seen as extension of or giving voice to the grievances and muted demands for social justice of other fractions of the subordinate classes and groups.

Two issues arise from this, one of the concept of civil society, the other of workplace collectivity as a process of cultural action. Urry's (1981) effort at specifying the terrain of civil society is significant even if an eclectic one.<sup>12</sup> I am, however, imprecise about it myself. This is because it is all too easy to turn 'civil society' into a theoretical trash can into which everything that is not 'economic' or 'political' is thrown. This is, as Colletti (1972) notes, partly a problem contemporary marxist analyses inherited from the 2nd International marxism, which reduces Marx's category of 'economy' to technical dimensions of production. The issues of social relations of production and reproduction of 'material lives' are expunged. There is however no doubt that the specification of this social space is important in understanding not only the locus of family relations, living in

<sup>12</sup> While it is important to stress 'that forms are forms of social relations of production' Lovell (1980:249), it is difficult to treat every aspect of social relations under capitalism -advanced or peripheral- as mere forms of capitalist relations of production. Urry is right in stressing that the connection is one of 'relations to, but not determination by, the overall social patterning of capitalist social formations' (1981:8). Most obvious in Nigeria are ethnic, family or chieftain political relations, although their present forms are results of the contest with capitalist penetration. Urry's weberian slippage is however a major problem. Classes 'only exist within the sphere of civil society, which is itself outside the 'social relations of production'. 'Civil society' overlaps with the 'sphere of circulation' which is the connecting medium between civil society and the 'sphere of production'. Civil society becomes the same thing as 'society' in Weber's sociology. Urry ends up exorcising class struggles from the 'sphere of production', since conflict between 'capital and labour' takes place only in the 'sphere of circulation' (p.27, vide p.116 Fig.7.1).

quarters, religious communities, even schools, as terrains of social struggles. They are by no means reducible -particularly in a peripheral capitalist environment- to forms of capitalist relations of production. Their reconstitution in struggles involving past and current processes of capitalist penetration is vital in understanding their complex location in, and implications for contemporary social relations. They are hence not simply extensions of the State as the Althusserian project suggests. It is within the sphere of family, neighbourhood, for instance that workers are constituted as part of a larger mass of 'poor people'. The constitution and reproduction of autonomous class/group cultures which underscore the subversion of the hegemony of the dominant bloc, but also its partial legitimization. As I noted, hegemony cannot be seen as absolute or total (Gramsci 1971, Hyman & Brough 1975), but often fragmentary and incomplete. I have demonstrated this in terms of work and non-work relations.

The second issue is that, the Lateral Community in work is also the terrain of cultural activities, which links the question of consciousness with forms of resistance. I earlier referred to Cabral's (1980) work on national liberation and culture. Without suggesting that every action of the worker constitutes resistance, or more absurdly that workers actions in the workplace are forms of national liberation effort, the understanding of work collectivities as 'cultural' repositories of oppositional and protest activities, allows analysis to get away from the 'dual' consciousness view of workers' action (Mann 1973), or what I call the 'big bang' theory of workers consciousness and action. Some of the 'hidden' (Cohen 1980) forms of resistance that I have cited are nourished by the collectivity in work. In locating the relations as value relations, the distributional forms of workers oppositional activities are not just products of 'relative deprivation', but objectively rooted in the production and distributional relations. In a society like Nigeria, where the State is central to the accumulation (or rather the appropriation) process, the sensitivity of the workforce to the diversion of resources from the circuit of capital into the sphere of revenue (by way of corrupt practices, etc.), is not busy-body preoccupation. They represent legitimate class issues and indicative of a popular desire for more equitable distributional relations. It is in their obscure, seemingly pedestrian forms, that the issues become part of national political struggles.



At the everyday shopfloor level, these represent distinct if embryonic conception of the world, -which I call alternative morality- 'which manifests itself in action' (Gramsci 1971: 327). The consciousness does not cease to exist because they are not manifested in the throwing of molotov cocktails and tearing down capitalism. Both the collectivity in work and the covert forms of resistance are the foundation upon which firm Union actions -discusses elsewhere- are based. Specific incidents, collective experience of workers and struggles, may serve as catalyst for an 'explosion' of consciousness, but it is not as if it never existed before. The contradictory elements in workers' perceptions reflect not only the contradictory nature of 'reality', as lived and experienced, but also the contention between received ideological interpretations of the world, on the one hand, and workers' (and subordinate classes/groups) collective and individual experiences and reflections, on the other hand. The implications of these for the processes and institutions of mediation are explored in Part III of this work.

**PART III:**  
**THE POLITICS OF PRODUCTION.**



## Chapter 9.

### UNION, LEADERS AND MEMBERS.

#### Introduction.

This chapter, the first of two on the 'Politics of Production', examines the nature of trade unionism in the corporation, with the emphasis on intra-union relations. I will be concerned primarily with the union of junior workers; NUPENG, although brief comments about PENGASSAN are made where necessary. In the previous chapters, the discussion of shopfloor relations has been largely to the exclusion of either Unions or the formal processes of interest mediation between workers, the supervision and management. This is an obvious partial explanation; an exercise in one-sided abstraction, although many of the issues raised earlier would still remain valid, with or without unions. As will be demonstrated, the shopfloor relations have in fact given unionism in the Refinery (NNPC generally) its distinct character. On the other hand, the fact of unionization, the construction of new collectivities beyond the immediate work-group, section or the plant, are significant for shopfloor relations and life. These are some of the issues that will be explored in this chapter.

The main arguments in this chapter are as follow; first that the 1976/77 restructuring of trade unions has radically altered the terrain of union activities. The statutory recognition of union coverage, guaranteed in the restructuring, does not however eliminate management hostility; NNPC was unionized in the face of this hostility. This will be discussed in section 2.

Secondly, I examine the developments within the national union between 1978 and 1987 against the background of the conventional analyses of intra-union relations. Lipset et al (1956) for instance, present the issue of union democracy in terms of existence of a 'two party'-type system involving a definable opposition group and rapid leadership turnover. On the other hand whilst accepting the issue of leadership turn over, Martin (1968) insists on the 'effectiveness of opposition' (p. 227) and the leadership's inability to

prevent the opposition's propaganda and electoral mobilization activities. These positions invariably take trade unions internal relations 'as a self contained area of analysis' (Hyman 1975:69). On the contrary, I will demonstrate the implications of concerted management hostility to the union, and how the intra-union conflicts provided the leeway for the management intervention. In a sense, unless the notion of opposition is context-sensitive, it loses sight of how oppositional activities can become extensions of 'external' hostility.

Thirdly, that it is important to understand the contradictory location of union leadership (and this issue will be picked up in section 4). On one hand, representing the members often requires taking a conflictual and militant posture, while on the other hand the leadership have to come to terms with the imperative of cooperation required in dealing with management or State functionaries.<sup>1</sup> The imperative of cooperation, I argue, is ideologically reinforced by management and state functionaries. The process of ideological 'reconstitution' of union leaders takes varied forms: through training sessions organized under the auspices of management, the ideology of 'procedural process' (Hyman 1972, 1978) and 'mature' trade unionism, etc. This process is complemented by provision or denial of material resources necessary for union activities and recourse of management to the agencies of state coercion; issues that are most relevant for the leadership at the local level. At the national level, the union leadership is faced with the sometimes virulent, and at other times subtle ideological hostility to 'disruptive' union activities. Again the ideological onslaught is complemented by state administrative and coercive actions (or threats of such actions) against the union as an organization or its members.

The fourth argument, and a significant dimension of intra-union relations, is that although the unions is faced with limited resources, the union hierarchy often takes the collectivity of trade union membership for granted. In the absence of a sustained and deliberate construction of a trade union collectivity, relations between local and national leadership, and between leaders and members could remain largely idiosyncratic. This situation reinforces the tendency for cooperation at the expense of representation on the part of local leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> This insight is owed to Richard Hyman (1972, 1975, 1979, 1984, 1984a)



Finally, I will argue that we begin to understand the nature of union relations at the plant level for instance, in terms of the dynamics of the shopfloor. In other words, in terms of the nature of the labour process, the production and distributional relations and the collectivities generated at work; this links with the issues raised in the preceding chapters. The mutually reinforcing nature of shopfloor lives and unionism will be explored. It is in these mutually reinforcing relations that we begin to understand the leadership/membership relations. I will contrast what Beynon calls the 'aristocratic and militaristic' (1984:232) model of leadership, prevalent in conventional industrial relations understanding of union leadership, with a 'two-way process' (Beynon *ibid*, Hyman 1975, 1979) of leadership and membership relations. Often management attempt to fashion the former type whereas the members demand the latter. The response to what is seen on the shopfloor as leadership betrayal could be phenomenal. It is however important to place this web of relations within the specific social/cultural context of a peripheral capitalism, even when informative of a more international context.

The chapter is divided into two main parts: in section three I discuss the developments (at the national level) in the union since its inauguration, while in section four I explore the dynamics of leaders/members relations at the level of shopfloor unionism. The discussion in sections one and two explores the state relations in NNPC before unionization and the unionization process, respectively. This enables us to put the phenomenon of unionism into perspective.

### 9.1 The Pre-Unionization Period.

The discussion of work relations, in the preceding chapters was undertaken with minimal effort at differentiating the changes in the relations over time. This is partly because of my concerned with relations at the time of the field work, and partly to avoid pre-empting the present discussion. Nonetheless, both the Refinery and the larger NNPC had been in operation or existence for three years before the emergence of unions in 1980. For most of the workers, the most dominant image of the pre-unionization period is the capacity of the management to impose discipline, stifle or neglect any protest or dissent with impunity. As one of the first lay officials of the union put it;

the administration here was very very, would I say, you know, very repressive. It was very tough then, because... you know, like at a stage.. you'll just receive a telephone call from nowhere to ask if [so and so] is there. If it happens [that] someone said that you were not there, the next ten minutes you'll see a query, asking where you went... You know, there was fear. I must tell you, we were entertaining fear, everybody feeling... as if insecure... Insecurity!. At any moment you could be sacked. Nobody could say anything, nobody could question it.

That was in Falomo; you get a query, you answer it and then 'you leave your fate with management'. If you're lucky you would get a written warning put into your personnel file. In Warri, life was a lot harsher, particularly among plant workers, the dominant feeling is that the supervision then was least interested in giving a written reprimand, more like the boot most of the time. Perhaps an enduring example of the time, usually given, was the case of a Jetty operation shift crew in 1979. The Nigerian Manager- in-Charge [the old title for the General Manager], caught one of the workers 'bleeding' the dual-purpose kerosene line. The whole crew got the sack the following morning; and that was it, regardless of the fact that only one member of a crew of twelve workers was caught. There was nothing anyone could do about it, despite the feeling of injustice -that still pervades the narration of the case. It was also not the only case of mass punishment. In cases where the management felt there was mass culpability, either by association or refusal of members of a group to snitch on one another, the whole group could be kicked out. The labour turnover statistics of the refinery (see Figure 6.2) reflect this trend. The line chart shows a 264.7% rise in the rate of workers being fired between 1978 and 1980, and a sharp drop of 226.3% between 1980 and 1981. It was only in 1981, the first active year of the union in the plant, that we find the turnover figures tumbling down.

Beside keeping quiet and getting on with the work, there was little option open to the workers other than quitting. And in the three years between 1978 and 1980, nearly 200 workers resigned or just walked out on the job, this is against slightly over 70 for the following three years. The pay and conditions of service were hardly any better (see Ch.6). The issue of a collective voice began to be raised in 1979: the second year of the refinery coming on-stream. A petition, signed by 265 shift workers, was collected in October, and sent to Lagos; it called for payment of shift allowance. However in the absence of any viable workers' organization with both a voice and teeth, neither the Lagos



nor the plant management was going to treat 'petition writers' with anything but levity. The petition was tucked away in Lagos. This was however the first move in the production workers' effort to find a voice, the first in the attempt to form a National Association of Petroleum Refinery Operators [NAPRO]. The effort in Production led to Maintenance workers setting up the 'Maintenance Council', which was to be the medium of a collective voice. These were being formed out of the 'natural' collectivity of the shopfloor; the combined terrain of the lateral and vertical collectives. NAPRO was to include all grades of Operators; from plant workers to the Supervisors, but both the production and maintenance workers' effort was to be overtaken by processes external to the plant.

Among the workers at the headquarters in Falomo, hardly any definite move was made towards organizing a collective voice. Underlining this was the limited experience of unionism they shared with the refinery workers. As the 1st Vice-Chairman of the Lagos unit of the union puts it;

I must say that, really it never occurred to some of us that we belonged to any particular trade union. Personally, I thought that we were going all about the whole thing..., to start a new union whenever, eh, you know, we wanted. But, because we were never used to unions, we didn't know even that there was already a petroleum union created for us to participate in.

But between the end of 1979 and February 1980, the situation was to change dramatically for the workers in Lagos, and the effort of the refinery workers to be overtaken by the events; the unionization of the NNPC workers.

## 9.2. The Unionization Process: 'Get Organized.'

The first effective move to unionize the workers came in September 1979 with a couple of union organizers, from NUPENG coming to the NNPC Headquarters with pamphlets, informing the workers of the union and their eligibility. In Warri, the process took the form of the regional union organizers meeting some of the workers outside working hours. Either of these is perhaps a familiar mode of unionization. The distinction is however in the emergence of the union itself and the capacity it had to overcome management opposition by invoking the statutory guarantee of its coverage and legality. To understand this, we need to step back a couple of years.

As I explained in Chapter 3, a major restructuring of trade unions was undertaken by the Military regime between 1976 and 1978. During this period, a total of 42 'industrial' unions, 15 senior staff associations, 4 professional unions, 9 employers' associations and a central labour organization were established. In Mid-1978, two decrees were promulgated making check-off dues automatically deductible from union members' salaries, and giving legal recognition to the 70 unions and associations. The law made recognition of these unions by employers compulsory.

The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers of Nigeria (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) were two of the bodies established at this period. NUPENG -an amalgam of 21 existing unions in the oil industry before the reorganization- was inaugurated in November 1977. Its coverage was the junior workers employed in the oil industry; from prospecting for crude oil to the retail points. At the time of the restructuring, PENGASSAN was made up of only the senior staff associations of Shell-BP<sup>2</sup> and Esso and never got off the ground until 1979.

The NNPC management stonewalled the initial unionization effort of the union both in Lagos and Warri, refusing to engage in correspondence with the union. The union national secretariat, however decided in September 1979 to go ahead and launch the branch, involving a new round of pamphleteering. The request of the union to use the premises at Falomo was flatly turned down, so the launching venue was fixed for an eating house next to the complex, this was 24 October, 1979 and only 21 people turned up for the launching. As Obasi, the 1st Lagos unit Vice Chairman puts it;

You can't believe it. They [the workers] said management was intimidating them, that anybody who joined the union is finished; they're going to sack him. So only 21, turned up for the launching. Which almost discouraged us, but some of us said, 'No we must go ahead, we must go ahead. In a revolution you don't expect everybody to be present...', you know. Well we launched it, elected our officers, you know.

Whatever one thinks of his 'revolution', they were making a minor one. As Obasi points out, '..anything to stop all this way of handling workers'. 'At least workers', he

<sup>2</sup> The Shell-BP senior and junior staff unions were proscribed in October 1977 for violating the 1976 decree which made strikes illegal in the 'essential services' industries (see Ch.4). This barred the two unions from participating in the formation of NUPENG and PENGASSAN.



insists, 'should have a voice, somehow...' The union was to become their own voice. The management did not however seem to be relenting in its resolve, but now there was a union foothold. The national union used this to pile on the pressure on the management, but the union within, in the meantime 'went underground'. They started holding meetings;

secretly within this building too; after office hours we will go up; to the canteen. It was not a canteen then, but it was just an open space... Some of the time we were there the GM<sup>\*</sup> then, would come in the evening. I mean when he would have been given information that we were around. So if we saw him coming we'll disperse and carry our papers and move out.  
[\* GM (PSD)]

For almost all of them in the executive it was their first time in a union, first time they ever bore such responsibility. They did not, as Obasi says, want to rush, they wanted to outline their objectives; 'what we were looking for, what we intend to achieve.' They wanted a 'clean slate'. Although the national union kept corresponding with the management, for many of their work mates, the union seemed to have disappeared; that was until 3rd December. This time they came public with a handbill entitled 'We have come a long way', produced by the new crop of activists on the corporation's cyclostyling machines, and hand-distributed at the Complex gate. It outlined the grievances against the management, the conditions of work, etc. The effect was electrifying, even the activists were themselves taken aback;

Ah!, a' mean, I couldn't believe it; the impact it had, because they never thought that there could be a group of workers or staff of NNPC, who could come out to say certain things;... those things. Openly challenge management's authority to do some of those things.

It was only the beginning and the response stoked the flame inside the leaders. The union general meeting was fixed a week after the handbills were distributed and they asked the management for the use of the open space on the top floor, as the venue for the meeting; but the management flatly refused. To prevent such a meeting, the entrance to the place was bolted. This unyielding opposition only boosted the unions' credibility with the workers; more 'popular and powerful than you ever expected.' Unlike the claim of unionization in Warri Refinery 9 months earlier, which the management stonewalled into oblivion, the tactic would not work this time. Now it is a union based within the workers and fueled by it. The response of some of the members was to take down the bolted doors

and hold the meeting regardless, but the local leadership had to stem the tide. A new dimension was coming up on the horizon and as Obasi said, they had information that the management had written to the state security agency [the NSO];

...that we were destructive elements, that we planned so-and-so; that day of the meeting to set cars ablaze, burn the building; all kinds of things. Very long letter to NSO!. By the Personnel people!, you know. We had this information already, so we were careful... Even if anybody wanted to be destructive, we said, "Nah..., please."

Now they had to guard against what they felt might be people instigated by management to cause chaos, to validate the allegations in the letter. But none of these was going to stop the meeting. On the morning of the meeting scheduled for after the close of hours, the unit Chairman and the other lay-officers, went round the offices reminding every one of the meeting, and to reassure them that the union will live.

Unsolicited, the Security Guards at the gates -also NNPC employees- locked all the exit points before the closing time, that kept everybody in. The meeting was, one union worker noted, unprecedented; the giddy feeling of pioneers with fire in the breasts. Never seen before, never matched since in the enthusiasm. Grievances were re-stated and demands made; from management handling of workers, to condition of service: from the provision of canteen services to the dismantling of the newly installed clocking machines at Falomo. Unknown at the time, they also had some uninvited guests; officers of the state security agency. After the meeting, the unit union gave the management an ultimatum for recognition.

The management seemed to have boxed itself into a corner; the recommendation for Union recognition was made to the Board of Directors and approved on the 28 December. While the recognition activity was bustling in Lagos, the situation in Warri was more subdued; apart from the meetings with union organizers outside the workplace and the election of an executive, there was little in the way of fire-works. Demands for recognition made to the plant management was referred to Lagos and until Falomo acted, the Warri management would do nothing. The NAPRO effort was being pursued in the process areas as well, but it was to be an abortive exercise; it never passed the legal test.



The intensity of the opposition from the unit union at Falomo led to management dismantling the clocking machines and the conversion of the top floor space into a canteen commenced. For the lay activists, it was the first victory, now they began to feel that as a collective they could make a difference. The recognition meeting with the union, local and national officers was held on 23 January. On 4 February, the Managing Director in two separate memoranda informed the staff of the recognition of NUPENG as the union representing junior workers and the arrangement for automatic deduction of check-off dues. Later, in time for the first negotiation with the management, the union executives from Lagos, Port Harcourt and Warri met at the Union's secretariat in Lagos to elect Branch officers to speak for the whole of NNPC. If the union had come to stay, the issue of coverage remained unresolved; whilst the national union demanded coverage of everyone below the Management cadre, Management wanted to limit the coverage. In pegging coverage to workers on GL 14 and GL 17, the management cited the 1979 Decree 86, which barred union membership to employees 'recognized as a projection of management' (S.13). The management insisted that Supervisor cadre, with salary entry point of GL13 is such 'projection'.<sup>3</sup> In November 1980, when the demand for the recognition of PENGASSAN was made, the tactic changed; the Head of IRU, in a management memo, observed;

Unfortunately, we have flogged the issue of extension of Management while citing decree 86 to determine the coverage by NUPENG and it is now difficult to resort to this same legal interpretation in the case of Senior staff. Our approach therefore, should be to limit our relationship with the Senior Staff Association as much as possible to consultation rather than negotiation.

He was relying on the practice in the oil industry at the time, not the determination of the emergent NNPC PENGASSAN branch not to conform to the practice in the oil industry where the multinational concerns had coerced their indigenous 'senior staff' into acquiescence. By the end of 1980 NUPENG was inaugurated in all the operational units of NNPC across the country and PENGASSAN was on the move.

<sup>3</sup> The Director of Industrial Relations at the Ministry of Labour first offered the IRU officials the advice for a use of such an argument, at the 18 February (1980) meeting in the Director's office.

In order to appreciate the state of NUPENG intra-union and leaders/members relations within NNPC, it is important to sketch the development of the union since its inauguration; its organization and relations between different levels of the Union. The analysis at this stage will concentrate at the national level, and it is to this that I will now turn.

### 9.3. Union, Leaders & Members: the national scenario.

When NUPENG was established in 1977, it brought together two opposing camps in the tradition of pre-1977 trade union politics in Nigeria. On the one hand was the 'Consolidated' group, with a general secretary steeped in the conservative unionism of the United Labour Congress. (vide Cohen 1974, Waterman 1982, Ananaba 1969). This group was jointly led by A.E Otu, its General Secretary and John Dubre, the President of the Agip workers' union. On the other hand was the group of unions, notably Shell and African Petroleum (AP) -formerly BP- led by younger activists with a militant perspective. This group was jointly led by Frank Kokori and Joseph Akinlaja, the Secretary and President of AP union respectively. There were other unions outside these two groups or previously organized outside the oil industry. The Nigerian Tankers Drivers' Union is a typical example. At the end of the inaugural conference, Dubre was elected President and Otu appointed General Secretary; Akinlaja and Kokori became Vice President and Deputy General Secretary, respectively.

#### 9.3.1 The Union Organization.

In the Union's Constitution -vetted and approved by the Ministry of Labour- the General Secretary (GS) is the chief executive officer of the union, and directly in charge of the National Secretariat. The Deputy General Secretary (D-GS), a number of Assistant-General Secretaries (A-GS) assist the General Secretary; these are the appointed, full time and salaried officials of the union. The A-GSs are substantively either Departmental Heads in the National Secretariat or heads of the Zonal Council offices in the zonal areas -more about these in a moment-. There are also the elected officers of the union; the President, Vice-President, the National Treasurer and the Internal Auditor, and other elected National Executive officers. At the 1980 delegate conference of the union,



a post of Deputy President and 3 posts of Vice President - representing each of the 3 zonal areas existing at the time-, were created. The elected officers are worker-members of the union, nominated and elected at the delegate conference, and normally expected to be part-time officials. The National Secretariat in Lagos, is the union's administrative centre. Given the distribution of the oil industry workers, 3 zones were created in 1977, viz.; Lagos, Warri and Port-Harcourt zonal areas. The fourth; the Kaduna zone in northern Nigeria was created in 1983. The zonal councils bring the NUPENG units in a geographical area together, enabling the council to address peculiar local issues.

The union has two chains of membership and organizational links; one vertical and the other horizontal. At the helm of the vertical is the national secretariat. Workers in a given firm like NNPC form a 'Branch' of the Union. Where the same employing firm has many operational points, workers in each point constitute a 'Unit' of the Branch; so that Warri Refinery NUPENG members form a 'unit' of the NNPC Branch. In PENGASSAN, this is called the 'chapter'. The Unit, led by lay-officials, comes under the Branch which in turn relates vertically with the Secretariat. The Zonal Councils are also, vertically under the Secretariat.

Another chain of vertical interaction is formed by the other organs of the union. The Delegate Conference is the supreme body of the Union, and this has to be called biennially. The conference sets the policy tone of the union, elects the national officers and appoints or dismisses the salaried officials. The conference is constituted by Branch delegates,<sup>4</sup> the national officers, the Chairmen and Secretaries of the Zonal Councils. In between Delegate Conferences, the National Executive Council (NEC) is the policy making body. The NEC is composed of elected national officers, Chairmen and Secretaries of Zonal Councils and the General Secretary; the GS is a non-voting member, and the NEC sits at least twice a year. Below the NEC is the Central Working Committee (CWC) which sits at least once a month and is composed of the elected and appointed national officers, overseeing the activities of the Secretariat. In all these, the line of relations is

<sup>4</sup> A branch with between 1 and 50 members is entitled to 1 delegate, the branch with 50-100 members has 2 delegates; 100-500 has 4 delegates, 500-1000 member-branch has 6 delegates. Branches with 1,000-5,000 members have 8 delegates, while those with more than 5,000 members are entitled to 10 delegates (Rule 6(iii)).

vertical. If the salaried officials hold the rein of day-to-day administration, two elected officials; the President and the Treasurer, as signatories to the union account, hold the purse strings. Although this relationship is meant to check the power of full time officials, this could become a focus of intense conflict.

The second pattern of relations -the horizontal- is most dominant at the zonal level. The Zonal Council is made up of the Chairmen, Secretaries and Treasurers of the units of the union in the zonal area. In the case of Warri Refinery for instance, it brings the lay-officials in contact with not just other units of the NNPC Branch in Warri area, but also those employed in other firms. The Zonal Council Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer are elected by the college of unit lay-officials. The Council meets at least once in three months and an A-GS heads the council's administrative staff. Although the AGS is subordinate to the Council -which is dominated by lay-officials-, the A-GS reports directly to the national secretariat, which puts the AGS in a dilemma in periods of tension between the zonal council and the national secretariat. The Zonal Council and the Delegate Conference are the only points of formal, horizontal contact among shopfloor activists in the union.

The Branch and Unit levels of the union, as earlier pointed out, relate directly to a common employing firm. The Branch, like the Unit is led by an executive committee of Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, their assistants, and other elected officers or ex-officio members. At the Branch level, the ex-officio members of the executive represent the units and are often the Unit Chairmen. At the unit level, ex-officio members are hand-picked representatives of the different departments. Both Branch and Unit leaders are subject to annual election, although the NNPC Branch in 1984 approved a two-year term. The NNPC Branch usually hold a branch delegate conference, at which new Branch leaders are elected.

### 9.3.2 Solidarity, Crisis & Schism.

The seeds of the two major issues that will fore-shadow the state of the union for a decade were planted at the union's inauguration in 1977. The first concerns the relations within the union; where the traditional relationship between salaried secretaries of



a union and the members, was one of the dependence of the latter on the former, this changed drastically with the new unions. Furthermore, whereas lay union officials had traditionally little to do with national union politics, the new union structure -unintentionally- puts them at helm of their unions, and through the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) provides them with a direct link to national union activities, national politics and international union activities. While this has the potential for providing a platform for grass-root voices and demands, it can also create a gulf between leadership and membership with serious repercussions. The second issue concerns the response of those exercising the power of Capital (Management) to the existence of a union with a militant posture; the first seven years of the union was to witness first disparate management intrigues and then a concerted effort to castrate the union. It was the combination of these two issues that was to create problems within the union.

The precursor of these developments started in December 1977. A month after Dubre was elected the 1st President of the union, the Agip management promoted him to the post of Assistant Personnel Officer; the entry point of senior staff grade. In 1978, the Agip management demanded Dubre's resignation from the union, but in the absence of management control over the union members (as in the case pre-restructuring 'house unions') such a move had to depend on opposition from within the union to effect the removal. The Agip management was however, faced with a united union leadership which resented the interference; the NEC stood by the President, on the understanding that he would resign after his 1st term of office. There was little Agip could do about it, and the issue was laid to rest for another two years.

In the meantime, the union was mainly involved in unionizing the industry and establishing a powerful base and tapping the strength of their members' location in a sensitive industry. However, by the end of the year, cracks were beginning to appear within the union, especially between the President and the Secretary General. Prior to the restructuring, the paid Secretary, as Kokori explains;

was like the lord of his union. He owned his union, he kept the [union's] certificate [of registration]. If you disagreed with him, in his own union, you go and look for another secretary, because you can't sack him. It was almost impossible. You could carry the whole of your Branch from him, from his own secretariat. And that is if the whole workers agreed.

With the new arrangement however, the GS became subject to the membership and could easily be vetoed by the elected officials. The latter also hold the purse strings, which strengthens the President's position. Although the post of president is part-time, the constitution requires the incumbent to "keep himself in close touch with the activities of the Secretariat.." (Rule 13). The other dimension of this change in unionism is that for most lay-members and leaders, the union is "theirs" instead of the "Secretary's", the paid official came to be seen as an 'employee' of the workers' union and sustained by 'their check-off'.<sup>5</sup> Adjusting to this new situation was not to be an easy experience for most of the old GSs and in NUPENG's case the GS faced a vigorous president, increasingly getting involved in the daily running of the secretariat. The GS resented the encroachment into his lair.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, a new pattern of alliance was emerging, different from the one that existed at the period of the Union's inauguration. The lay-officials were beginning to establish a community of interest among themselves vis-a-vis the salaried officials. As the D-GS at the time noted, it was growing into a case of the whole NEC elected members facing down the GS, and the latter was losing ground;

If the General Secretary gets stuck in the office like a bureaucrat, he loses political ground to the President and can get easily pushed out.

It was in this atmosphere of division between the GS and the lay-officials, that the Agip management, early in 1980, decided to move again on their 1977 promotion of Dubre. This time Dubre was asked to choose between his job and the union, but he refused to quit the union, Agip then suspended him from work. Within the union leadership, there was suspicion of the GS's complicity in the case;

there may be some truth in it. See, the [Agip] management was too close to Mr Otu.

<sup>5</sup> It is easy to overstate this point; studies by Smock (1969), Price (1979) and Lubeck (1986) did not reveal dependence on paid Secretaries. The point is that beyond the plant level, unions were dominated by professional trade unionists (Cohen 1974, Waterman 1982, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> The thrust of this analysis is owed to Frank Kokori, the General Secretary of NUPENG .



Help, for the president, this time was to come from a different and unexpected area; the newly formed union in NNPC. Obasi, who spear-headed the response to Agip management explained;

I was at home that day, you know, one Saturday reading, eh, PUNCH... Opened the page, and read that the President of eh, NUPENG has been suspended by Agip management. I couldn't believe it. I said which NUPENG is this. Our own NUPENG?. I said maybe there are other NUPENGs, not this our own. But to be sure, I went inside... my room and brought out eh a circular to compare with what is written in the newspaper, whether it is the same name. I read it, it was the same thing. "Ah ha, this is terrible, how can this be?. The President of our Union, suspended by Agip management?. Ah, if Agip a small company could do that , it means that we are in trouble in NNPC." That kind of thing. So I said this can't happen.

He sat down, drafted a reply to the Agip management, polished it and discussed it with other members of the Unit executive, the following Monday, who approved it. The letter, or "memo" as he called it, accused the Agip management of attempting to blackmail the union, and wanting to 'create chaos in the industry'. There was a thinly veiled threat of calling out the union members in NNPC in protest if president was not recalled. It might have been all bluff and gas, but it had the desired effect. A copy of the letter came back to NNPC's Managing Director who got the Personnel Manager to haul in Obasi. But the latter's capacity to face down the manager, and the support from the other unit leaders, convinced the management that the threat of a protest walk-out was real. The NNPC management brought the Agip management to heel and for the union it was a significant victory. But the Agip management refused to recognize Dubre's membership of the union by not deducting his check-off dues.<sup>7</sup>

It is however important to put the incident into perspective. The spontaneity of the response of Obasi and others might be put down to their activist 'impulse' or even an element of self-preservation, but that would miss a significant point. They were not inspired to do it by the national union leaders or anyone. Within the space of 5 months preceding this event, they had met the union leaders in the unionization effort. They had come to see the national union or the officials as part of themselves, not some external group. The union came to have a specific meaning for them, their effort for a voice, to stand up to management and they had done this with the help -no matter how minimal- of

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<sup>7</sup> Dubre however continued to pay his dues directly to the union's account.

people like the union president. In other words they had established a community of interest and feeling with the national officers, a constituency constructed in the fiery period of making the union a reality in NNPC, in spite of management opposition. It is only within the context of this constituency or community -without underplaying their individual initiative and courage- that one can appreciate the feeling that it was not the Dubre as an individual that was on trial, but the Union; it their union and therefore them collectively, that was being violated.

The Union might have won the external battle but the recrimination and suspicion between the president and the GS was deepening. The GS was also beginning to alarm some of the salaried officials by his kind of rapport with management and, what his deputy called, aversion for strong and militant unionism. The GS was however beginning to get some support from the Port-Harcourt zonal area, where the GS had called 'his political base'. The challenge to Dubre's presidency however came from the Lagos area. At the November 1980 biennial delegate conference, held at the University of Lagos, the post of president was contested by G.C Okolonji, from AP. There is little to suggest that Okolonji's candidacy was inspired by the GS, but the election turned out to be a closely contested one. The incumbent won by 15 votes (105 to 90), most likely secured by the block vote of the 17 tanker drivers' delegates. The D-GS, on whose advice the drivers' delegates voted for the incumbent, saw the victory as a lesser of two evils;

Dubre was a lesser evil, than the other man; Okolonji... would just be in the pocket of Otu and the reactionaries [in the labour movement] and the Management.

Beside the external consideration was the D-GS's fear that with a President and GS in the 'camp', '...they could even manipulate my sack.'

A post of Deputy President and two additional posts of Vice President were created. The incumbent Vice President; Akinlaja, won the Deputy Presidency, but among the newly elected Vice Presidents was one Linus Ukamba, who had been leading the opposition from Port Harcourt zonal area. The result of the presidential election seemed to have left some in the opposition quite bitter, but it could not be attached to electoral malpractice. The voting and counting were done openly at the conference venue. The lay-



leaders from the Port Harcourt zone and the AP branch, in Lagos, came to epitomize this opposition, nonetheless the AP Branch leaders were isolated within the Lagos zonal council. At the same conference, an amendment was made to the Union's constitution, making union membership open to all workers in the oil industry was also approved, a move inspired by a popular desire for a single union for non-management workers in the industry rather than the president's membership status.<sup>8</sup>

It was against the background of the bitterly contested presidential election, in 1981 that the union faced its most serious crisis; what became known as 'the Akinlaja case.' In 1978, the Union was able to persuade the AP management to allow Akinlaja - employed as a Laboratory Technician in AP's Apapa installation, off the Lagos island- to start a polytechnic diploma course in Lagos. The final arrangement was to place Akinlaja on permanent night shift, and he could have the day time to attend school, this arrangement was maintained until early 1980. With the departure of the previous Managing Director, the AP management used Akinlaja's referral in some of the courses as the excuse to call-in the tabs. The course, it was insisted was interfering with Akinlaja's performance of his job. Under the pressure, Akinlaja withdrew from the course, but in mid-1981, the AP management decided to promote him out of the union. He was asked for a written undertaking that he would withdraw from the union. AP management decided that the union activities were disturbing his job performance.<sup>9</sup> Akinlaja, on the advice of the Union Secretariat, declined both the offer of promotion and the written undertaking to quit the union. At the end of July, the AP management declared him redundant, a decision the Union decided to resist. A number of issues contributing to this development need putting in perspective.

First, it was clear to the AP management that the opposition to the national union leadership being led by Okolonji meant that if there was any local support for Akinlaja, it was really thin on the ground. The AP branch had in fact by early 1981 stopped the pay-

<sup>8</sup> The Registrar of Trade Unions refused to act on the amended constitution that was submitted to his office for approval; as required in the 1973 Trade Union decree.

<sup>9</sup> Akinlaja's post of Deputy-President involved him in travelling outside the country, but for the fact that the AP management wanted to make an issue of it, it is common practice to allow union officials time from work to perform their union duties.

ment of the check-off dues to the national union. Secondly, the relationship between this group and the GS had become strong and it was clear to the AP management that the GS was in sympathy with their case: the GS's opposition to the union's decision to fight the AP management was an open one. Finally, unlike on the two previous occasions, in Dubre's case, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Employers' trade group of NECA, discussed steps to be taken by AP management. The trade group was beginning to find the union's strength and militancy unacceptable; the written undertaking from Akinlaja to quit the union was in fact suggested at a July meeting of the trade group. The feeling was that unless Akinlaja was forced out of the union, other lay officials in other firms might resist being promoted out of the union and Akinlaja was to be the test case.

The Union called a press conference on 15 September to announce the decision to call its members out on a sympathy action in early October. However, in a letter to the AP Personnel Manager (dated 23 September), the Apapa unit of the AP Branch, where Akinlaja normally worked dissociated itself from the proposed industrial action. By the time the trade group met on 29 September, it was in a comfortable position. Even the NNPC management representatives who were earlier convinced of the NNPC Branch unions's sympathy for Akinlaja and willingness to take strike action, seemed calm. The decision was therefore taken for each management to call in its branch executive and instruct them that the case was between AP management and the AP branch, and therefore did not concern the other sectors of the industry. If there was a continued desire to strike in sympathy, the 'no work, no pay' principle should be thrown at the union officials, and in the meantime, the NSO was alerted. NNPC management, for its part, flew the new Branch Chairman and Secretary into Lagos (from Warri and Markurdi respectively) for a briefing and used the 23rd September letter to buttress the management's argument. The two branch officers then issued a statement on 6 October, to their members, that NNPC branch would not join until AP branch took the lead. Once NNPC branch, with the largest membership and national spread withdrew, any hope of successful industrial action collapsed. The national secretariat had no alternative but to 'suspend' the proposed action; the union suffered its first major defeat.



A number of issues in leadership/membership relations however need to be highlighted in this case. First, and perhaps most significant, is the crisis of national leadership and their loss of contact with their grass-root members. With all the trappings of national office; access to national political platform, international trips and conferences, etc., a gulf begins to emerge between the national lay leaders and their members in their local units. The distance is not only in terms of increasingly different daily experiences of the leaders and members, but it is also physical; the demands of the union office often mean the lay leaders' absence from the work environment. More often than not, the distance is resented by the members where the leaders are not seen to be using their posts in ways relevant to members needs and aspirations. If it seems the typical Michelsian syndrome (Michels 1915), it is important to note that it is the non-relevance of the leadership to members' needs and aspirations that is the crucial element. Although the union constitution demands that national officers relinquish their branch or unit post, it does not mean abandoning the unit or the local membership. In Akinlaja's case, a groundswell of hostility was emergent as early as 1979, and as he himself admitted; he never took it seriously. The reaction, -typically- was to dismiss such hostility as the work of 'dissidents' or 'rebels' within the branch, rather than being indicative of a shift in popular opinion. In addition, he failed, with the benefit of hindsight, to understand that when the management was granting him the space to start his diploma course, it was something the former felt compelled to do rather than a gesture of good-will. They would call the tabs when they felt it was prudent to do so.

Second, when the union leaders announced they were calling the members out on a solidarity action, they were talking to the media, the management and State functionaries, rather than their members. It was becoming a ritual to use a press conference to announce demands rather than grass root organization. They took the union membership for granted, as a pre-given constituency rather than one that has to be articulated and related to on every issue. The reaction of the new NNPC Branch leadership typifies this crisis. At the 1st Branch delegate conference held at the Warri Refinery in mid-August 1981, the old branch leadership -with which the union secretariat had established a firm relationship- was replaced by a new one. In the electoral negotiation that preceded the

election for the post of Branch Chairman, the D-GS attempted to persuade one of the 2 candidates, from Warri Refinery, to step down for the other. The chap being persuaded (Usamah) felt slighted, and reacted angrily. The D-GS's moves were then used to campaign against his favourite candidate and Usamah won. Not only were many of the delegates unfamiliar with the D-GS unlike those involved in the unionization effort, they felt no sense of collectivity with the national secretariat official. When the management then flew the Branch Chairman and Secretary into Lagos for briefing, a month and half later, they were just in the state of mind to make management's argument -that it was mainly an issue for AP Branch- seem reasonable enough. This was made easier because they had neither been briefed by the national leadership nor been involved in planning any action.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the union was not only fighting the Akinlaja case in a state of internal division, they were dealing with a concerted management and NECA, not just the AP management.

In the recrimination that followed the Akinlaja case, the union NEC at its November meeting decided, under the union's Rule 12(x), to retire the General Secretary on the 'grounds of ill health'; the D-GS was appointed Acting G-S. There was little doubt that it had to do with Otu's role in the Akinlaja case and Akinlaja was himself absolved into the secretariat as an A-GS. In December the retired GS and some people from the AP Branch and the Port Harcourt zonal council decided to call a press conference to launch a rival union, however the statute establishing the unions recognizes only the scheduled unions, it was therefore a futile exercise from the beginning. The splinter group did not, in addition, have enough support to command anybody's respect. However the AP Branch leaders continued withholding their check-off dues. The NNPC Branch leaders, in the aftermath of the recrimination between them and the national secretariat, also withheld the Branch's check-off dues but they were to get a great deal of bashing from within the Branch for doing so. By the end of December, the National Union seem to have recovered fairly well; its image was boosted by a successful dispute with the management of

<sup>10</sup> It was the leaders of the Lagos unit whom the NNPC management interviewed, who were sympathetic to the national leaders' case; the same group that had fought beside the national leaders in the unionization drive, but the Branch leaders rather than the Lagos unit leaders were now calling the shots.



Keydrill Oil Company -an oil drilling firm- between December and January. The union settled into the old rhythm: the national leadership had regained control of the Lagos zonal council, Warri zone remained loyal, and the Port Harcourt council remained 'rebellious'.

By this time however, all the ingredients of the Union's most traumatic experience were already in the making. By the second half of 1982, the recession in the world oil market was causing cut-backs in production and workforce in the industry, particularly the small service companies. Around the same period, the PENGASSAN in NNPC had a dispute with the management, which led to a strike action and the referral of the dispute to the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP). At the end of November, 1982, the IAP found in favour of PENGASSAN on broadly all the demands. The result of this was to widely increase the gap in the fringe benefits of junior and senior staff within NNPC. The minimal Housing Allowance paid to a PENGASSAN member for instance doubled; from 100 naira to 200 naira, increasing the differential with the highest paid NUPENG member from 30 naira to 130 naira. And this is just one of 8 different items.

Among the shopfloor workers, there was a strong feeling that their case for the management to restore the balance was not only reasonable, but morally justified. This was heightened by the knowledge that every concession, they in NUPENG had won in the previous two years, had led to an automatic adjustment in the pay and allowances of the senior and management personnel. The management's argument that the NUPENG collective agreement still had another year to go before it could be re-negotiated was seen as a typical management ploy to block shopfloor demands. It was in this atmosphere that the 2nd delegate conference of the NNPC Branch of NUPENG was held in December 1982. The feeling over the issue was running high, and the determination firm. In January 1983, the Branch's new executive approached the National Secretariat for assistance in fighting their case, the national secretariat officials were however sceptical and they told the NNPC union leaders so. The former's main objection was on the same line as the management; the last collective agreement was still in force, negotiation could not be re-opened until it expired. The secretariat officials' adoption of the ethics of collective bargaining confronts the moral argument of shopfloor members.

In February, when the PENGASSAN awards were being implemented, there was increased shopfloor pressure on the branch leaders, and the latter returned to the secretariat, and this time they had a hold on the national officials. Around this time the national union decided to make a stand in its fight against the wave of retrenchments in the smaller companies in the industry with Dresser Marcoba, a service company. The company in early 1983, embarked on cutting back the workforce and turned down the local union's demand for a negotiation of the redundancy process. The union felt that the only way to achieve a negotiated redundancy was to take industrial action. The strike in the operational areas -Warri and Port Harcourt- and flying pickets organized by the Lagos zonal council of NUPENG however, did nothing to convince Dresser's management. The latter responded by sacking the local union leaders, it therefore became clear to the National Union that no matter how long the Dresser branch stayed out on strike, the marginal nature of the Dresser's service in the industry, meant such local action would not make enough impact to force a favourable government intervention. The decision was therefore taken to organize a nation-wide solidarity action in the industry. On 8 March, a 21-day ultimatum was given to the Dresser management, simultaneously putting the government on notice. That was time enough to weld the union nation-wide into one determined organization and the union swung into action.

#### **The 1983 NNPC Strike and the Beginning of An End.**

The NNPC Branch leaders whose members are vital to any nation-wide action, suddenly found themselves a bargaining chip; they informed the national leaders that they would support the national solidarity action, only if the secretariat backed their demands with NNPC management. For the GS,<sup>11</sup> it was not only blackmail, but sheer 'economism'. His distinction on the morality of the NNPC local union's demand was essentially Leninist; for him, the Dresser workers' case for jobs, to be treated as human beings by functionaries of capital, was a class issue: 'all our morals, our reputation was at stake'. But NNPC workers were crucial to the success of the solidarity action, and for the NNPC local union leaders, the terms of their support for that action was the only way to achieve

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Kokori, who had been the Acting GS since December 1981, was confirmed as substantive GS in January 1983.



the demands of their shopfloor members' moral demand for a fair remuneration for their labour. Both sides however realised that they could 'kill two birds with one stone'. Negotiation with NNPC management would start, while the Branch Union planned for a 'wildcat action' in the event of a breakdown in negotiations, this would meet the NNPC local members' demand and also provide the opening shot in the nation-wide action. Since the industrial action in NNPC would have been on for a week before the national solidarity action commenced, it was thought this would bring the government, NNPC and Dresser to the negotiation table. In Warri Refinery and other locations of NNPC, the union prepared their members for a 'wildcat' action, while the negotiations began on 17 March, in Lagos. The arrangement in the locations was that if there was no news from the branch leaders of a breakthrough in the negotiation by midnight of 18/19 March, a 'wildcat' walkout should commence.

By Saturday morning of 20th, the action started in Warri Refinery with the night shift workers and by Monday, the action had spread to other locations in the country. It will suffice, for now, to point out that before the NNPC Branch leaders departed from Lagos, they agreed at a meeting with the Secretariat officials that if there was going to be any re-commencement of negotiations with the management, the branch leaders would be in session. They then left to coordinate action at local level. What Branch and National union leaders did not bargain for was the ferocity of the media and the NNPC management reaction.

With the intense media hostility; the arrest and detention, in the Kaduna Refinery of the local union leaders and the sacking of 100 strikers, the NNPC management's threat in Lagos to sack all the striking workers, and the pressure on the union's President from within the trade union movement itself, the secretariat sued for peace. The national leaders, presuming that the strike was collapsing, claimed they had to avert a major humiliation for the union. The President got in touch with the NNPC Managing Director and arranged a meeting for the following day, Friday the 25th. The Union's delegation did not however include the Branch leaders who were still in the various locations. The agreement reached at the meeting led to the NNPC management getting Dresser management to back down on the redundancy claims while the national union called off both the

solidarity action and the NNPC strike. The demands of the NNPC local union were referred to the Industrial Arbitration Panel for settlement. All this was done without consulting the local members in NNPC or their leaders. The local union members and leaders felt betrayed and abandoned, but after an extra week on strike, the local leaders and members called for a return to work. What followed was totally unexpected by the national leaders. In the highly emotional<sup>12</sup> meetings that followed the return to work, the workers simmering with rage, mandated the Branch leaders to get rid of the President and the GS who 'sold out' on them. Money was also contributed towards prosecuting this project and fighting their case at the IAP. Neither leaders nor members realised they were going down a road of almost complete decapitation of the Union as they had previously known it, and their leaders swung into action.

The national leadership was however, more vulnerable now than at any other time and one reason was that the biennial delegate conference that should have been held in November 1983, had been left to lapse. In January, in response to the demand for a delegate conference, mainly from people opposed to the leadership of Dubre, the NEC decided to postpone the conference. The reason given was that the union had its hands full with fighting the redundancies in the industry and therefore did not want to dissipate energy at the time by organizing a conference. This postponement provided the opposition with the argument that the union's constitution had been violated. In any case the national leadership's argument was an afterthought, considering that the decision was taken two months after the conference should have been held.

There are however two plausible reasons for the indefinite postponement. First, the union President at the 1981 delegate conference of the NLC was elected Deputy President, and in the negotiation about the successor to the NLC President, at the conference, it was agreed among the various unions that the next NLC President should come from the 'private sector' unions. The incumbent, who won the maximum 2nd term was from a 'public sector' union. Dubre, the NUPENG President, was slated at the 1981 conference as the 'private sector' unions' candidate for the next conference. However, he

<sup>12</sup> I use 'emotional' in the sense of deep-felt feelings, rather than in the negative 'irrational' sense prevalent in 'rational action' sociology.



had to be sponsored by his union, in addition to being a member of the union, in order to qualify for the NLC presidency. These conditions (and this is the second factor) were however being threatened from inside the union itself; those opposed to Dubre within the union began using the fact of his 1977 promotion, to the senior staff cadre in his workplace, against both his membership of NUPENG, and therefore his qualification to run as union president whenever the NUPENG delegate conference was held.<sup>13</sup> It is safe to insist that this fear was the main reason for the deferment of the delegate conference, but up till the collapse of the NNPC strike, not too many people in the union were interested in the President's eligibility, as long as the union was looking after the members. Dubre's clout in the trade union movement had become so strong that the GS was not in a position to threaten Dubre's chances at the next NLC conference by insisting on a delegate conference. But as Kokori noted, Dubre had become the union's 'achilles heel, waiting to be pierced', and this time was the time.

In a flurry of activities in May and June, the local leaders in NNPC and their representatives in all the zonal councils, established links with the union's right-wing opposition in AP, in Ukamba's NOLCHEM, and the Port Harcourt zonal council. Frantic efforts at reconciliation were being made by elements within Lagos and Warri zonal councils, who realised the gravity of the danger posed to the Union, but the President and the GS failed to comprehend the nature of the crisis, this time. They had come to take opposition within the union for granted: that it would come and go away, except this time it did not and as Kokori noted;

I was taking them lightly. I never knew there were some other powerful forces. I was only estimating their intelligence and what they can do. That's why I never took them seriously, because I knew the people. I said 'Auwh, they're gutless people.' I never knew.

What he did not know also was that the national leadership was not just facing the old isolated right-wing opposition, but the size of the NNPC branch, the NECA-organized managements in the oil industry, the Registrar of Trade Unions, and the right-wing of the trade union movement.

<sup>13</sup> In fact in late 1982, Ukamba, the union's Vice President for Port Harcourt zone and main opposition figure, took out a writ challenging Dubre's membership of the union.

On 2 July, a reconciliation meeting called by the Lagos zonal council, in Warri was taken over by the new opposition; they used the constitutional provision that allowed a majority of the zonal councils to call for a delegate conference to do just that. They also went on to suspend the union's NEC and constitute a 'Caretaker Committee' pending the delegate conference, both of which were unconstitutional. This was in spite of the protest from a number of the zonal officials at the meeting. The opposition group wrote to the Registrar demanding a delegate conference and the latter, in a letter dated 8 July, instructed the GS to call the conference within 3 weeks. A scheduled meeting for Friday the 15th, between the GS and the Registrar to resolve constitutional tangles of whether to deal with the NEC or the 'Caretaker Committee', was never held. In an unconnected incident, the Registrar committed suicide in the early hours of Friday.

In spite of the protests from many of the people alleged to have signed the July 2nd declaration that they did not, in spite of the unconstitutional suspension of the NEC, the suspension of the GS, etc the people around the Caretaker Committee pressed on. They arranged for a conference in Warri for 29 July. The GS and the Secretariat officials however, decided not to pay too much attention to the conference which was to be another grave error. The conference called by the opposition -a 4-hour affair- went ahead. Although the 'delegates' at this conference neither reflected the branch-membership of the union nor was the procedure constitutional, they were able to elect a new set of national officers, suspend the General Secretary and create a separate faction.

The main Union responded with condemnation, and went on to organize a delegate conference in October, at which Dubre was re-elected President. This conference, in range of attendance and procedure for organizing it, better reflected the union than the 29 July conference, but the damage had been done. For the next three years the two groups in the union were to be locked in litigation, claims and counter claims about the real and authentic union. The break-away faction, led by Richard Uzegbu<sup>14</sup> was however enjoying unprecedented patronage of the management in the industry and the right-wing of the trade union movement. The check-off dues became the new weapon that the oil

<sup>14</sup> A Laboratory Technician in Warri Refinery, Uzegbu was elected Unit Secretary in 1982, and Branch Secretary later that year. He was elected President of the break-away faction in July.



companies used against the main Union. In firms like Shell, where the local union was within the main Union, the management refused to pay the check-off dues into the Union purse. In firms whose local union was in support of the Uzegbu-faction, the check-off dues were paid into the faction's account. As Uzegbu said;

The management impressed us, especially those who felt that Dubre was becoming, eh, a colossus in the oil industry and eh, also a tyrant, causing one strike after the other. In fact impressed us and eh, gave us all the assistance they could.

In February 1984, a week to the NLC delegate conference, the break away faction got a court injunction which -based on the dispute over Dubre's membership of NUPENG- restrained Dubre from contesting the NLC election. The Uzegbu-faction had by now become a major element within the right-wing opposition, inside the trade union movement. As Uzegbu notes, the court injunction was a spoiler, inspired by the right-wing elements within NLC. It was however, the penchant for obtaining court injunctions that became the Uzegbu-faction's undoing. By December 1984, the main Union decided to regain the union by organizing a delegate conference in Warri. While the Uzegbu-faction got an injunction from the court restraining the conference organizers, the latter elected a new leadership for the main Union. From now on, the Dubre-achilles heel was removed: the main Union could now claim to have a legitimate leadership. In early 1985, the NLC leadership invited the main Union's leaders to take up the seat allocated to the union in NLC's Central Working Committee. In terms of NLC's internal politics, this would increase the voting power of the Left group and the Right-wing group responded by inspiring the Uzegbu-faction to challenge the NLC invitation to the main Union. It was this litigation which was to lead to a see-saw of court decisions between 1985 and the second quarter of 1986.

An Appeal Court overturned an earlier decision of the Lagos State Chief Judge to grant legal recognition to the main Union. The main Union -with a more polished organizational power- responded to the Appeal Court ruling by calling out the Tanker drivers arm of the union on a strike action. The government had to intervene to resolve the issue of the legitimate leadership, and in an agreement worked out with the Ministry of Labour a delegate conference of the whole union was to be organized at which fresh elections

would be held. However, shortly before the agreed date of the conference, the Uzegbu-faction reneged on the agreement. In the ensuing recrimination, the government desolved the two factions and appointed a Sole Administrator in September 1986, who took over the running of the union and organized a delegate conference. The conference was held in February 1987 and Wale Dada, the President of the main Union between December 1984 and mid-1986, was re-elected President. A couple of days later, Frank Kokori was re-appointed the Union's General Secretary.

The factional disputes, as could be imagined was to have severe effects on the union organization within NNPC itself; especially the Warri Refinery or Falomo units. It is to the issue of leaders/members relations and unionism at the local level that I will now turn to.

#### 9.4. Union, Leaders & Members: the shopfloor scenario.

The arrival of the union in the Refinery, and in Falomo -as noted above- marked a major turning point, not only in relations between workers and the management but also among the workers. This is in spite of the susceptibility of the Union to a high degree of instability, both at the national and local levels. On the one hand, the union -to turn Gramsci on his head (see Hyman 1971)- has become the basis for overcoming the segmentation imposed by the labour process. On the other hand, the previous unionization efforts only reflected the immediate, experiential collectivity of the labour process: while NAPRO and Maintenance Council involved a vertical unity of the work areas, the current boundary of unions broke that unity down.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 10, there is little doubt that all the concessions won by the workers so far had been due largely to the union as a collectivity. However, the relations within the union remains extremely volatile, most reflected in members/leaders relationship.

##### 9.4.1. Union, Members & Leaders.

The volatile nature of leaders/members relations emerged soon after the union was established in the refinery. For many, the union -as their collective voice- would

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<sup>15</sup> This has no doubt restricted the ease with which job-specific issues like chemical and other work hazards could have been fought.



bring an end to the authoritarian character of management, but in mid-1980, the local union faced a major test over this issue. The head of the maintenance section at the Housing estate had for sometime been selling lubricating fluid, meant for the power plants, to local business-persons. Although it is difficult to ascertain the background factors, in mid-1980 some junior workers in the section petitioned the General Manager, blowing the whistle on their boss. Contrary to the expectation of many of the workers, no disciplinary action was taken against the sectional head. The petitioners on the other hand, were all moved from the unit and some of them were demoted; most lost their jobs within the next couple of months. The story at the time was that the officer had himself threatened to blow the whistle on a number of senior management persons if any disciplinary action was taken against him. Many workers believed that the failure of the management to impose any disciplinary measure was a proof of high level complicity; after all, many junior workers had lost their jobs for less.

The union intervention in defence of the junior workers was resisted by the management, and the union leadership responded by calling a union meeting. As one of the union activists at the time explained;

Ekoemwoye [the chairman] came and called the masses that he needed their support, because this was a big challenge. That if somebody towards management cadre can commit such a crime and no proper action was being taken, then they see no reason why they should be victimizing, the lower cadre. So we saw that the fight was genuine, so we all gladly contributed money. And the aim of contributing the money was to take the management to court. And we nearly took a lawyer; a real learned man.

Both members and leaders had not, apparently, realised that they would have to rely on their power as industrial workers, rather than on 'learned men' to fight their battles. The meeting at which the final decision on the case was reached between the management and the union, was attended by the union Chairman, the Secretary and another member of the union executive. Others complained that they were kept in the dark about the meeting, but it was what followed that was a major shock to the members. The senior official involved was transferred to a different department but no other action taken against him; in fact at the end of the year he was promoted and the petitioners over a periods of months, all lost their jobs. No lawyer was taken and neither were the monies contributed



by the members refunded for some time. The members suspected complicity between the management and some of their own leaders; the margin of 'favour handed to the chairman' afterwards for many was indicative of the complicity;

...moving here and there, on management sponsors[hip]... He could stay one week, 2 weeks without coming to work. Nobody [questioned] him. They gave him money to squander, just because he was protecting them, instead of protecting his members.

But it was the implication of all these for the members that served as the final straw for the members. It had been thought that the establishment of the union would bring the management's authoritarianism to heel, but in the aftermath of the petition incident the arbitrary exercise of managerial power increase;

the management started gouging people; any small thing, off!, any small thing, off!!... They started dealing with workers ruthlessly, to the extent that nobody was safe. And anybody could be called and sacked and nobody could say anything, except if you're strong enough to fight it, to contest it externally... How many people are bold enough to contest such thing with the Chief Executive, when he's armed financially and everything. See that?...

A groundswell of hostility was developing against the core of the leadership held responsible for the state of things. The promotion, at the end of the year, of the three union leaders alleged to be colluding with Management, only served as evidence for many members. But if the leaders were safe with the management, they were not with the members; for many members, the betrayal of members' confidence is a capital offence. The Chairman did not help the situation either, by his increasing distance from the members, and what someone called 'arrogance'; the alienation was almost total. By March of 1981, the opposition had crystallized into definite group actions, but they had to wait until July for the union elections to come up. The union executive was dissolved that month in the absence of the Chairman and new elections were held under the supervision of the union's Zonal officials. Four years after, the moral indignation at the 'sell-out' still runs high. As Kenneth Usamah, the succeeding unit chairman insists;

If the families of those people [sacked] are dying today, they [the union leaders & management] are the murderers. Because, not that they sacked them because they were inefficient, not because they came late to work, not that they were not subordinate to their eh, bosses. They sacked them because they spoke the TRUTH!, truth that will help us sustain this industry. If you were in their shoes, how would you look at those people?. Eh..?



The new leadership came in on a clearly militant agenda, to re-assert the union as the voice of the workers.

In contrast, the leadership of the Lagos local union was forging a different line of unionism. Beside the national negotiations on improved pay and fringe benefits, the union was engaging with the management on a host of local issues; from provision of service at the Corporation's clinic to the Canteen and personnel matters. Well before the issue came up for negotiation, the local union had successfully insisted on automatic annual salary increment and the conversion of 'casual workers', mainly cleaners, to full-time employment. Their particularly combative posture went a long way in establishing the credentials of the union among the members. For the local leaders, their business was as much in protecting their members as in being 'involved in the proper administration of the... organization.' As Obasi puts it;

A trade union leader who was passing along the corridor, maybe the suck-away is broken down, it has been there for some days, nobody cares, you know. Pick up your pen and tell them [management] to come and clear the nonsense there... it is disgracing this place... That is what we used to do here, we did it several times.

But it was not just a question of actively encroaching on 'management prerogative', their style of relating to their members was also quite distinct. Union general meetings were called at least once a month, and in between meetings, members are kept regularly informed of communication with the management through circulars. Their aggressive style of representation and defence of their members was reciprocated by members. As Obasi explains;

[the management] didn't know the source of our force, see that kind of a thing?.. what was going on. Because of the whole way we were operating, people were not afraid of giving us any document, any document at all!. We don't know them, and 'am telling you till today I don't know the people. I don't know one person... They'll just drop something on my desk, when I come, I open it; fantastic document!, you know.

It was a case of mutual dependence of members and leaders, one feeding on the other for sustenance, embolding the aggressive style that made the union a very strong force at the local level. The union's strength was most typified in the issuance of a counter instruction, in May 1980, to the one sent out under the authority of the new

Acting Managing Director. The Ag. MD on the day he was sworn-in left an instruction that all the members of staff should remain at work until his arrival from the Supreme Court where the swearing-in took place. The union reacted swiftly, as Obasi points out;

The first thing!,... that nobody should leave until he comes back. Aah!, wonderful!!. I said 'in this place?!. He can't do that kind of nonsense here. We're not his servants. We challenged him!. Seriously, say we must go. We can only wait till the official time, by 4.30[p.m] we are leaving, if he doesn't come back, he can sleep here. It's not anybody's business.

Although the potential crisis was averted by the early arrival of the Ag. MD, the incident is indicative of the organizational strength and authority of the union under this leadership. As part of the effort to maintain a close link between the leadership and the members, the idea of appointing 'ex-officio' members representing each work group or section into the union executive, was introduced by the Lagos unit; a practice that was adopted in Warri in 1981.

The union leadership elected into office at the Refinery, in 1981, took a more determined line than their predecessors. The departmental representation in both decision making process and serving as the link between the leadership and members involved having 23 'ex-officio' members representing the various units and departments. Although the tenure of this leadership saw a better working environment for the workers; arresting the rate of disciplinary measures imposed by the management and better pay and conditions of service, the crisis that was to undermine this leadership emerged soon after the election. The 1st Branch delegate conference, as I mentioned earlier, took place at the Warri Refinery, in mid-August. The conflict that occurred over the election for the post of Branch Chairman was exacerbated some weeks later, when Usamah issued the circular withdrawing the NNPC Branch from the solidarity action in the Akinlaja case. Over the next months, the hostility between the national officials and the NNPC Branch leaders, led to the latter insisting that the NNPC management should withhold the check-off dues from the national union. However, within the Warri Refinery unit, the chairman<sup>16</sup> and the secretary disagreed vehemently on the local union's postures to the national secretariat, which created incessant conflict within the unit executive. For many members, it

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<sup>16</sup> The unit's chairman (Usamah) was also the Branch chairman of the union.



was a case of a house divided against itself, and at the July 1982 local union elections, the whole executive was swept out of power. A new leadership emerged at the election with Frank Onwugbenu and Richard Uzegbu as Chairman and Secretary respectively.

By the time of the election however, the nature of membership participation had been radically altered. The efforts at setting up NAPRO had fizzled out, but the lateral collective, particularly in the Production area and in Maintenance have become potent forces in mobilizing opinions as well as being pockets of activism within the union. The lateral communities provide the framework of the endorsement for candidates, and the new leadership reflected a growing confidence of the union. Onwugbenu's executive brought with it a gutsy style of representation; direct intervention in cases of individual grievance, which often involved abandoning the grievance procedure. The response to a case in 1982 typifies this posture. In late 1982, a number of Warri Refinery maintenance workers were sent to the Kaduna Refinery to assist in the 1st turn-around maintenance of the plants. In a fire accident in the plant, two junior workers in the Warri refinery contingent suffered serious burns. Although the accident victims were being treated in hospital in Kaduna, the Warri Refinery management made no attempt to contact their families. As Onwugbenu said;

I went over to the Superintendent, because the guys were from, eh, Instruments, and eh, blasted him I said if this issue, if this accident had happened to one of you here, the whole refinery would have known. Why are you treating these boys' case with levity. Their wives are here and they have learnt that their husbands were 'dead or alive', and we want their wives to be flown to Kaduna to see their husbands. He said "Ehh.., he has not got any report from, eh...". I said do you, would you have waited for them to come and cry to you here?. Would it not have been better for you to send somebody to their homes or even report to management that these guys' wives would need to be told. And you know like in our style that guy got right up there in my presence and went to the Head of Maintenance. So before we knew, in fact before that day was up, the [airlines] tickets were purchased. And the girls went to Kaduna and stayed, hotel everything. Flew them to Kaduna and back, you know.

It was a mode of response that was popular with the members at the time and the new shop stewards picked issues of victimization or maltreatment by the supervisory staff as their main target. As the Head of Industrial Relations department in the refinery admitted, they would storm his office without prior notice and would refuse to leave until an issue was resolved. For Onwugbenu and others, it was a way of keeping the offensive

in their own favour, coupled with some innate suspicion that once you give the management personnel too much room to manoeuvre, they would seize the initiative. It also meant that they sometimes returned to the complainant empty handed. This required as Onwugbenu says, a gentle treatment;

There are those rights which to [the workers] were theirs', and if you as the leader goes into it and discovers those rights are as a matter of fact are not rights as such, you cannot go immediately back to him and say , "Eh, look, it's not your right".... We'll analyse the issues and at that point if it requires our going back to the boys who gave us the complaint, we'll go back and teach them.

It was within the framework of the high level of leaders/members rapport that the 1983 strike -led by Warri refinery workers- was organized; from the 'wildcat strike' to the mobilization to maintain the strike, well after the national leadership had called it off, and workers in Kaduna refinery and Falomo and other units had returned to work. Although the strike collapsed, the level of members' commitment to the leadership remained very strong throughout 1983. That was until the content of a memo written by the head of Industrial Relations in Kaduna Refinery reached the shopfloor in Warri Refinery.

The Industrial Relations officer in the leaked memo, dated 25 October 1983, was reporting to the Head of Personnel in the Kaduna Refinery on a deal offer from the Uzegbu faction. The latter would withdraw the dispute between the NNPC management and the NUPENG (NNPC Branch) before the IAP in exchange for NNPC management support. The revelation fired some union activists in Warri Refinery, already alarmed by the break-up of the union and the role of their Branch leaders in it. When they mandated their leaders in April 1983 to depose Dubre, they did not seem to realise they were on the road to the destruction of their union. But what caused indignation among the shopfloor members were the implications of the content of the memo and the allegation of misuse of union funds.

In addition to the monies contributed for prosecuting the IAP case and the deposition of the national leaders, the local union leaders in Warri, -at the heart of the effort both- had dipped into the local union's Condolence Fund. The Fund, made up of direct shopfloor members' contributions in Warri Refinery, was set up so that the union could give money-gifts to families of deceased members. That the Fund could be used for any-



thing but the purpose for which it was set up, was for many members almost an abomination; a disrespect for the dead. Furthermore, throughout the IAP hearing, the union leadership continually reassured the members of a favourable ruling from the tribunal.<sup>17</sup> At the time the content of the Kaduna Refinery memo was made public, there were already signs that the IAP case had collapsed, since no ruling had been made by the tribunal, the initial efforts of opposition groups within the local union did not catch the popular imagination. Nonetheless in April 1984, a union general meeting was called outside the plant gate by the opposition groups, demanding the resignation of the incumbents. The charges of 'treachery' of the local and Branch leadership had not become a popular issue, although the opposition had in its favour the fact that no union election had been held since August 1983. The opposition still had to convince many other members who still supported the local leadership.

All that changed when in early June when the ruling of the IAP was made public and the union lost on all grounds. The jig-saw of the Kaduna memo, the rapprochement between NNPC management and Uzegbu faction of the union, etc., suddenly fell into place, and the members went for the jugular. Whatever support the incumbents had within the local union collapsed, the predominant feeling was of the leadership betrayal of the membership. It was not just that the leadership, typified in Uzegbu, made a deal with the management, but that all the emotional, physical and financial support of the members during and after the 1983 strike had come to nothing. As Okator, a Finance department clerk and lay activists insisted, no other leadership of the union had ever received such unqualified support of the members like the Onwugbenu/Uzegbu leadership. Emotion was running so high by the time of the elections -18 July 1984- that Police presence was required to prevent physical attacks on the incumbents. The election was supervised by the Heads of Industrial Relations and Security departments, saw the emergence of a new leadership with G.U Oogolor, a Production worker, as Chairman and F.B Dudun, a Medical clerk, as the Secretary.

The nature of leaders/members relationship as we have seen so far has been marked by rapid leadership turnover and tendency for convulsive reaction from members

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<sup>17</sup> Uzegbu was the unit Secretary and the President of the break-away faction.

in cases of 'leadership betrayal' or the other. This is evident from Peace (1979:115) and Ubeku (1983:79), is not peculiar to Warri Refinery. Often the pre-requisite of 'genuine' union leader is someone with a militant posture who as Ubeku puts it can 'give the management hell' (ibid.). This however, as it is clear in the refinery or NNPC in general, is a product of both the labour process and the production relations (distributive and social). Result often becomes the only measure of a union leaders' faithfulness to the members.

As a process workers puts it;

Gif' somebody message, mak'e go deliver 'am to another person, or say mak'e go get son't'ing come; na di t'ing wey'e come back, come tell you na'im you sabi, you naw know weder 'e gif' di person di message. Na when 'e bring better result come na'im you know say, true true 'e deliver di message. Abi naw be so?.

If you ask someone to deliver a message to another person, or that something should be collected; it's what he comes back to tell you that you know, you can't be sure the message was delivered. It's when he comes back with good result that you're sure the message was really delivered. Ain't it?

If the metaphor is derived from traditional folk sayings it depicts the twin problem of the exclusive nature of management/union relations which means only representatives are present in discussions with management. And the recurrent experience of the workers that deception by union leaders is a possibility; the experience of unionism has left many with a cynical perspective. Often a direct connection between national politics and union politics in terms of recurrence of 'mercantilist' leaders is drawn, and the only way the members are sure the leaders are working in their own interest is when a militant posture is open and seen to be so. Their experience of a national union leader that came directly from their midst, in the Uzegbu case has been a bitter one. Beside what is seen as collaboration with management, is as earlier mentioned, his 'arrogance' to the members.

In an angry commentary on Uzegbu, a process workers opined;

Naw be here we dey together before?. Dat one come dey wear suit, put on tie, come dey do yanga for we. 'E chop our money finish still dey take our money, upon all dey do yanga for we.

Weren't we co-workers here?. That one comes here in suit and tie and arrogantly flaunt it at us. After embezzling our money, and still living on our check-off, he's still flaunts it in our faces.

Beside all allegations of misdeeds, a significant aspect of leaders/members relations is anchored on the kind of relation in which union leaders are themselves involved with management representatives -a contradictory relation involving both cooperation and



conflict. A stable relation has to be established, sometimes a relation of trust, but the union leader cannot afford very cordial relations with the management personnel. Although the nature and implications of this will be pursued in the next section and Chapter 10, the implication for leaders/members relations can be illustrated here.

The issue of management's failure to release the 1984 personnel appraisal report - which determines who will or will not be promoted- had by mid-1985 become a focus of disaffection among the workers and raised by the union in consultative meetings with the management. In September when the Minister for Petroleum called a meeting with the union leaders on the reorganization of the Corporation and other issues, the question of promotion was again raised by the union. The Minister assured the union leaders that the management was working on the promotion exercise, and that by the end of October the results would be released. The union leaders took his word for it and the Minister's assurance was conveyed to the members at a meeting in the refinery immediately on the unit chairman's return from Lagos. But by early November nothing was forthcoming, again at a union meeting called to discuss the issues that the union should put to the newly appointed General Manager, the whole house agreed on the primacy of the promotion issue. At the follow-up union meeting, at which the union executive reported back to the members on the result of their meeting with the new GM, the chairman could only report that the GM promised to look into the issue and do something about it;

for a gentleman of his own calibre to say he's a man of action..., that he will look into it, I think we should take him by his words. Let's wait and see what he will do. If he fails then we'll know what to do.

Although there were those who shared the chairman's opinion, the response from the floor was one of disaffection summed up by the response of a female member who retorted;

Minister was a gentleman and he did not fulfill his promise, so this is another gentleman?.

Perhaps more uncharitable was the feeling among some that probably the union leaders were simply deceiving them about having 'delivered the message'. As Embelle, a Fire department worker puts it;

Naw be 'im Dudun\* dem, dey lie for us. I think say you dey dere when we dey discuss promotion for di meeting. We go send dem go meet management na different t'in deh go go discuss... We don hear di t'in wey management tell all of dem and deh come dey lie for we.

[\* the Union Secretary]

See Dudun and Co. lying to us!. You were at the meeting when we discussed the promotion issue. We'll send them to management, they'll go and discuss an entirely different issue... We've heard what the management told them, and they continue lying to us.

However valid or invalid the suspicion of leaders' naivete or deceit is, (a distinction that will be developed further in the next section) it needs a cursory comment here. The union leaders, themselves ordinary shopfloor blokes, were involved in a meeting with the Minister!. In the absence of a gut definition of the union and its members as the union leader's exclusive area of competence vis-a-vis the Minister, the Managing Director or the GM, the leader can easily fall under the aura of the Minister as a prominent political figure or that of the GM. Negotiations with management also involve the transposition of the union leaders into a different world. The world of lush carpets, football-pitch size conference tables, luxury chairs and humming air conditioner; all far removed from the environment of the shopfloor and the constant presence of their mates. It could be intimidating but it could also give union leaders a feeling of being involved in corporate decision making. (Further discussion in Chapter 10). A union leader requires some element of cocky disdain to overcome both the larger-than-life presence of the Minister or the senior Managers and the negotiating environment, to stand firm and fight back. The lay union leader in this case, is only a mirror image of many of the members, but it is not the members who are facing the Minister or GM, it is the union leader. Taking the Minister or the GM's words for it does not resolve the issue on the ground, and it is in this respect that the union leader received a lot of flak from the members.

The problem that a union leader faces is not, however, unappreciated by the members sometimes. As Udofia, a process worker notes;

Di union own na to bring di matter up wit' di management. Deh can't force management. Suppose management shut dem down!

The union's duty is to bring the issues to the attention of management. They can't force management. What if management proscribes the union!

The fear of proscription is not exaggerated. Unions had at no other time faced as much open hostility from the State and the state apparatus as in the period since the De-



cember 1983 coup that brought a new military regime to power. Between 1984 and 1985, the government proscribed the Pilots and Aircraft Engineers' union, the unions of medical doctors and the House Officers. In all the three cases, the union leaders were incarcerated. The experience is by no means exclusive of NUPENG. On four different occasions, various union leaders of the Kaduna Refinery unit, between 1980 and 1983, were arrested and detained by the Police and in December 1982 Dubre and Kokori were arrested and detained over a dispute on the oil fields. The increasingly authoritarian character of the government and the varied examples of reprisals against union leaders or the price of militancy within the workplace, are not lost on many workers. This consideration is often argued in rejection of pushing union leaders into doing things that would hit their families before it affects the members. But the problem of state coercive reprisals is hardly the only problem a leadership faces, and it is to the question of the dynamics of leadership that I will now turn.

#### 9.4.2. Dynamics of Leadership.

One of the main -unintended- outcomes of the trade union restructuring has been the access afforded shopfloor workers in direct control of the union from the local to national levels. As we have seen, shopfloor grievances can have a reverberating effect up to the NLC level; Union leaders, with their ears to the ground and part of that 'ground' bring an 'earthy' feeling into unionism. The positive dimension of this is that, they share in the experiences of the labour process, the distributional relations, etc. The union leaders for precisely the same reason are greatly handicapped -particularly at Branch and local levels. As far as one can deduce from the NNPC case, many union activists and leaders have had limited -or no- prior experience of union activism. Often the only thing they have going for them is a gut feeling about what they feel is right or wrong. In this they mirror their co-workers as demonstrated in Chapter 8, but unions, as Beynon (1984) notes, are hardly run on pure gut feeling alone. They need experience that does not purge them of their gut-feelings, while transforming these gut feelings into confident conviction.

The nature of pressures to which union leaders are subject are numerous, which in many ways attempt to foster what Beynon (1984:232) calls an aristocratic or militaristic

leadership. The ideological pressure is perhaps the most subtle; for most union leaders in NNPC, their first formal understanding of trade union history or industrial relations was through the series of courses organized by the management at both corporate and local levels. The courses are conducted with emphases on the pluralist ideology of collective bargaining and the concept of 'mature' trade union leadership. It not only outlines what a 'good industrial relations' is, but it is also the basis of re-constituting the leaders. But the process goes beyond the one-week course period. In their relations with management representatives, there is the constant reminder from the management side, that Nigeria had moved away from the 'table-banging' era of industrial relations into the 'civilized' period. In most cases the shop stewards' gut feeling is sapped by this ideological onslaught and they often have nothing to fall back upon, making them more susceptible to managerial manipulation. Almost all the Branch leaders for instance, put their 1983 strike down to 'immaturity'; for Joe Edeamerere, the Assistant Branch Secretary, they were 'being irrational at the time', but had since learnt to follow the grievance procedure. Although this may be dismissed as statements of a leadership that had already made its peace with management, the concurrence to the pluralist ideology emerges in subtle ways even among the more militant leaders.

A concept of leadership often flows from the above, which is illustrated by an incident in early September in the refinery. The union Secretary -Dudun- angrily walked out of the office of the Head of Industrial Relations department, feeling he was slighted during the discussion, Dudun threatened to inform his members of the way the issue was being handled. An Industrial Relations officer took Dudun into his office and in a very genial tone, told Dudun;

You don't say such things, apart from the fact that you're representing a group, human relations is very important. Even when you feel slighted, you don't carry it to that extent. You're a leader, you don't personalize things.

The Industrial Relations officer went on to explain that if the members hear of the issue, 'the problem will be compounded', and the idea was for Dudun to take things easy. No assumption of manipulation is been made here, in fact the contrary is the case. However,



unwittingly a -militaristic or aristocratic- leadership distant from the membership is fostered.

In addition to the ideological pressures are the material ones. The union has since its inauguration depended in one way or the other on management support. This ranges from the provision of office accommodation to administrative facilities. From transport facilities in form of use of the corporation's aircraft, vehicles or generous travelling cash advance to hotel accommodation during union activities or union/management meetings. Although the convention is for management to make these facilities available to union leaders, it is the prerogative of management, whether or not to provide such facilities. In many cases where the relationship between Industrial Relations department chiefs and the union leaders is not cordial, the facilities could be withdrawn. In fact in the case of Dudun cited above, the Head of Industrial Relations refused, some days later, to approve Dudun's application for a flight ticket to attend a union NEC meeting in Lagos. The issue from the union leaders' side is not one of being corrupted, but that they often need these facilities to function properly, since neither the national nor the branch union are financially able to provide these facilities. Perhaps a very dramatic instance of the use of material pressure was in the emergence of the Uzegbu faction. Immediately the faction emerged in the July 1983 conference in Warri, most of the managements in the industry stopped paying the check-off dues into the Union's account. In the meantime, the faction leaders discovered that it was going to take more than a kangaroo conference to run a union, pay staff, etc., and there is little doubt that the 'reconciliation' with NNPC management, as Uzegbu puts it, was compelled by this lack of funds. In 1984, check-off dues from the NNPC Branch formed over 45.8% of the total received by the faction, followed by AP's which was 16%.

In addition to the above mentioned forms of pressure is a more sinister type; i.e the range of coercive pressure available to the management. On four different occasions between 1980 and 1983, the Kaduna Refinery management had union leaders arrested and detained for union activities. The Head of Security in the plant until 1984, was a Deputy Commissioner of Police on secondment from the Kaduna State Police Command. On one occasions in 1981, a number of union leaders in the plant of southern Nigerian origin were

taken, under police escort, to Kaduna Airport and repatriated to Lagos. If this represent the extreme case, there has not been any doubt of the possibility of such pressure being exerted on shopfloor leaders in Lagos or Warri. I mentioned earlier the presence of officers from the NSO at the 1st general meeting of the Lagos unit in 1979. There are other more subtle pressure of similar effect which a union leader seen to be 'excessively militant' can face. In the same context of the incident involving Dudun, mentioned above, he was cautioned that;

You know you're not going to be in the union for ever..., so don't pile problem down for yourself and when you leave you start having problems...

The likelihood that these pressures will lead to a docile, conciliatory leadership cannot necessarily be guaranteed. It is enough however, to understand that 'union behaviour' (Clegg:1976) is not a naturalistic phenomenon; pressures towards a 'moderate' posture are engendered by given power (and class) relations in which unionists are involved, rather than a natural direction of unionism. Neither can the 'environment' of union activities (Martin 1968, Child et al 1973, Poole 1984: ch.7), be seen as just another variable in a sea of multiple variable of trade union activities.

The indeterminacy of these pressures in fracturing the leaders from the members, for instance, needs to be emphasized. The Branch and shopfloor leaders are themselves workers, daily sharing the same experience as their members. Even Edeamerere, cited above, still passionately argued the validity of the union's demands for commensurate remuneration in the 1983 case. Under specific circumstances, the countervailing pressures brought to bear on leaders by members can produce cynicism from the former. Ogogolor the Warri refinery unit chairman, for instance, once noted during the demand for promotion;

you know the promotion thing now; if I come back tomorrow and tell them they have promotion that day Ogogolor is the best leader on earth, but if they don't have it then Ogogolor is the worst leader on earth.

He was however reacting to the fact that it is those who would not participate actively in union; attend meetings regularly, etc, that are most negative in their evaluation. Yet his style at union meetings involves deferring to the members on what the leadership should



do. Onwugbenu whose active leadership was swept aside in 1984, in perhaps the most acrimonious of leadership changes witnessed in the Refinery, believes that what the members need is to be educated on the nature of unions. Most he said believe for instance, that the check-off dues are 'consumed' by the leaders. For Obasi, this is largely a responsibility of the leadership; the members could become nasty on some issues, but for him it is more a result of the leadership failure to keep the members informed on every issue. The onus he insists is on the leaders. It is the absence of this sustained contact and the persistent crisis of leadership that has in Warri Refinery created a cynicism about union leaders.

The problem however is partly in the relations of the national leadership with the grass-root members and leaders. Although the limited resources available to the union represents a major hindrance, there is nonetheless a tendency for the national union to defer the training of local union leaders to Management. In fact, less than four of some 28 union leaders in Warri Refinery have ever attended any union organized training session. For the national secretariat, the issue is seen largely in terms of savings on the limited union resources. But for a union which implicitly defines unionism in class terms, -at least since the end of 1981-, this breeds all sorts of problems. On the one hand, there is the assumption that any sort of training for the shopfloor unionists would do, and on the other hand, there is the failure to appreciate the extent to which, in an organization like NNPC for instance, the union is just one of the 'competing' constituencies being constructed. By itself union membership does not run counter to the corporate collective being fostered by the management and unionism could be fostered from a unitarist viewpoint.

Furthermore, community of interests with national union leaders and members in other firms is something that has to be constructed and constantly articulated. The result, of the failure to recognize these issues, is that the relations between shopfloor and national leaders -worst still between members and the national union- remains spasmodic and idiosyncratic. However, despite the persistent instability in the union, the relation of the members to the Union as an entity remained strong, and it is this that I will now discuss briefly.

### 9.4.3 Union & Members.

In the survey of the refinery workers, a set of issues on Union and union participation were put to the respondents. In response to the statement 'All workers should belong to trade union', 87.1% of the respondents (N=240)<sup>18</sup> agreed with varied intensity. Only 8.6% of these picked 'slightly agree' as their response, most significant is that only 10.4% of all the respondents disagree in any way. Given that PENGASSAN members have none of the traumatic experiences of NUPENG members, it is interesting that there is no significant difference between the responses of the two groups.<sup>19</sup> The response to the statement that the union is the only means by which workers can oppose policies of management that workers' consider bad, is in fact more affirmative. 90.1% of NUPENG members and 82.4% of PENGASSAN members agreed while only 6.3% and 13.6% of NUPENG and PENGASSAN members, respectively disagreed in any form.

The evaluation of union leaders on the other hand is less consistent. In response to the statement 'Union officials are not interested in workers problem', 72.6% and 70.6% of NUPENG and PENGASSAN members, respectively disagreed.<sup>20</sup> However when asked about the effectiveness of local union leaders for instance, the pattern of response drops sharply. Only 18.8% of NUPENG members and 17.1% of PENGASSAN members agree, that local leaders are effective. In fact among Production workers who are NUPENG members, the figure is only 9.1%, and 6.7% for same group of PENGASSAN members. Nonetheless, 27.7% of NUPENG and 36.6% of PENGASSAN members agreed slightly that the local officials are performing well. All these raise a number of questions on the variations in orientation towards the union on the one hand, and the officials on the other.

The union whatever the crisis it might have gone or is going through, remains quite significant as a collective voice for the workers. In the six years of its existence in the refinery for instance, it is through the union that the workers have been able not only to

<sup>18</sup> Q.29(1), Appendix A(i). There is no significant difference across the departments ( $\chi^2=12.73$ , sig. at 0.88).

<sup>19</sup> 90.1% of NUPENG members and 84.9% of PENGASSAN members agreed, with various degrees of intensity, that all workers should belong to unions.

<sup>20</sup> Among the NUPENG members there are variations across departments: 82.4% of respondents from Maintenance as against 45.5% from Production disagreed, and that's combining the 'Strongly Disagree' and the 'Disagree' responses.  $\chi^2=31.69$ , sig. at 0.04, Contingency Coefficient=0.468.



reduce the authoritarian posture of the management but also improve the level of remuneration for their labour-power. The union at the moment remains the only organization that can do that for the workers. It is also through the union that they are given a voice of a different sort, the very act of being able to do something, collectively make a difference in their labouring lives. The union also remains the only independent workers' forum for overcoming the segmentation imposed by the labour process. At the extra-plant level, it is the union that provides the linkage with other workers like themselves in other parts of the industry. These dimensions of the union need separating from the leadership style or idiosyncrasy.

I mentioned in Chapter 7, the extent to which the shopfloor collective is the terrain of overcoming ethno-cultural segmentation and chauvinistic ethnic ideologies; this process is also reinforced in the union. During the union meeting on the promotion issue for instance, one of the members, in response to the statement that 1985 promotion had been released in Kaduna Refinery responded;

...northerners, since time immemorial have been ruling us, dominating us and we southerners acting like cowards.

This is a well-worn aspect of regionalist chauvinism in the country, but almost immediately another speaker rose up saying;

The Minister is a southerner... I disagree with the last speaker, so it is not true what he said. Kaduna Refinery has released their own under the nose of the Minister and Warri Refinery has not. I don't know whether Amenechi [the GM] is a coward or the Minister is a coward but I disagree with the last speaker.

The cheering that followed, contrasts with the jeering of the previous speaker. The significant thing is not what this or that person says, but the ways in which the union is not just another association. It represents a workers' collectivity beyond ethno-cultural or regional boundaries, a new collectivity fostered by shared experiences of collective action and interest; a proto-class collectivity.

In another sense, the union by 1981 has become a repository of another of shopfloor activities of the workers. Although the practice of work-groups coming to the aid of their mates -financial support, etc- still goes on at the micro-level, it has been

adopted by the local union. In fact by 1982 a special fund was set up through voluntary contribution in the plant for providing financial assistance to bereaved members or their families in case of a member's death. The union still organizes financial assistance for members involved in accidents outside working hours, through members' contribution.

If the union helps overcome the particularity of work areas or departments, these still remain the forum of electoral participation. In organizing joint electoral ticket for instance, the spread of candidates across the various departments is still important. Production and Maintenance departments, because of their size are still favourite areas for electoral success in the post of Chairman or Secretary.

What the pattern of responses about union leaders point to is the appreciation of some of the dilemma of leadership, even for the best of them and in the most favourable of circumstance. Even when some 80.5% of NUPENG feel that some union leaders collude with management,<sup>21</sup> there is still a significant minority that would not knock the local union leaders too strongly. One can recall the statement of Udofia, cited above, that in confronting the management, the union not only faces a major opposition in the management and the State, but liable to being 'shut down'. That itself does not however deter from members making major demands of their leaders.

## Conclusion.

Although the bulk of the issues arising from the discussion so far will be raised in the concluding chapter, some concluding remarks may be made here. The overwhelming image of the union that would have come across to the reader is no doubt one of persistent instability, both at the local and national levels. NUPENG is in this sense, typical of many other unions. The crisis of persistence schism and uproar will no doubt be familiar to many students of Nigerian trade union movement. However on the empirical level, the present situation is significantly different from the pre-1978 situation. Whereas before, conflict often led those disagreeing to going off and forming their own organization, this is no longer possible since the Trade Union law do not allow for unions other than those

<sup>21</sup> Q.29(12), collapsing all the variations of 'Agree'. It is stronger among those who experienced the 1983 strike; 85%, as against 66.7% for those employed after the strike.  $\chi^2=10.69$ , sig. at 0.0048.



recognized under the 1978 amendment. Both the horizontal and the vertical boundaries of union coverage are clearly defined.

Conflict with the absence of exit as Hirschman (1970)<sup>22</sup> notes, means those dissatisfied would have to stay within the organization and devote their energies to achieving their objectives for improvement. This remains valid for national level intra-union relations when compared with the pre-restructuring period. From what can be seen so far, perhaps this represents a positive effect on union democracy, but it is hardly a cut-and-dry issue. In the forms in which questions of union democracy have been raised (Lipset et al 1956, Martin 1968), the assumption of persistence of 'standing' opposition and its capacity for mobilization and propaganda loses sight of the character of unions. Most bourgeois discourse of union democracy all too often involve the pretension that unions are just like any other 'plural organization' in a 'plural democracy'. If the validity of the argument is suspect (Hyman 1971, 1975) for advanced capitalism, it is more so in a peripheral capitalist environment like Nigeria. As demonstrated above, the nature of hostility of the functionaries of capital and the state to militant defence of members' interest is central to the destabilization of unions. Cohen (1974) has noted the extent to which imperialist international trade union organizations have blocked efforts at trade union unity in Nigeria, on the grounds of anti-communism. Internal trade union opposition can easily become not so much a basis for advancing internal democracy but for destroying it. The unions are involved in a 'game' in which all too often, the dice are loaded against them. However, if the restructuring put unions on a proper footing, it has a hidden sting; to the extent that the Management can hold on to the check-off dues, this can become a weapon against the unions.

Also important (on the issue of leadership/membership relations) is the extent to which union leaders are subject to all sorts of pressures, and I outlined the ideological, material and the coercive forms of these pressures. Nonetheless the issue becomes complicated for a union leadership which takes a community of interest between it and the members for granted; that the constituency has to be actively constructed and persis-

<sup>22</sup> While Hirschman's study was on the Nigerian Railway Corporation rather than unions, the work remains theoretical relevant. Cited in Crouch (1982).

tently articulated still remains unappreciated. Furthermore management's provision of 'industrial relations training' for lay leaders may, contrary to the current opinion among national leaders of the union, represent a negative force.

It is the conjuncture of these two factors above and a situation in which the leadership seems to be getting detached from their members, and become unappreciative of shopfloor sentiment, that pose a major threat to the union as a viable force. However one cannot assume a dichotomy between grass-root militancy and an 'incorporatist leadership' here. Most of the branch and local leaders are themselves shopfloor activists, often 'opinion leaders' before getting elected. Even if one could, the important thing is to understand the forces at work, rather than moralize. On the other hand, a detached leadership will, more often than not, meet with rebuffs of members both at local and national levels. If a Michelsian 'iron law of oligarchy' repeatedly threatens internal union democracy it is because, as Gouldner (1964) notes, there is an 'iron law of democracy', and this is not some innate human element. The persistent effort at re-asserting members' sovereignty flows from their locations in the production relations; the labour process, distributive and power relations, angers at being made mere cogs in someone else's wheel of production.

Persistence in leadership turnover however, does not itself guarantee the union as 'a medium of power for workers' (Hyman 1975:73). Extremely rapid leadership turnover may as in the case of the Warri Refinery local union, be detrimental to union effectiveness. In every case, the new leaders admitted it took them time to even begin understanding the mechanism of the organization. Acrimonious leadership change, also makes transfer of experience between groups of union leaders very difficult and organizational effectiveness may suffer in the end.



## Chapter 10.

## THE PROCESSES OF MEDIATION.

## Introduction.

In this chapter I return to an issue raised at the beginning of this work; viz, the status and nature of social practices conventionally called 'Industrial Relations'. In this respect two general issues will be addressed. First, that an understanding of industrial relations must be anchored on the nature and dynamics of production relations. Hence the reference to the terrain of industrial relations as the sphere of mediation (SIM); the institutions and processes of mediation. Secondly however, that to the extent that the SIM represents a mode of conducting production relations, it has to be understood in its own terms. I will therefore be paying attention to what I call the 'peculiarities of the sphere of mediation. To repeat a point made in Chapter 1, we cannot dismiss the existence and implication of the processes of mediation simply because we may not agree with what it may stand for.

Three specific points raised in the chapter are; the first concerns the character of NNPC as a unit of state-capital (under peripheral capitalism), with the implications that relations within the corporation immediately involves the functionaries and the institutions of the State. Some aspects of this have been explored in Chapter 9. Secondly, that the institutions and processes of mediation within the corporation reflect the wider group and class relations within the Nigerian peripheral formation. At both local and national levels of SIM in NNPC, it involves management functionaries in the manipulation of cultural resources, state and class powers. Some of these have also been discussed in the preceding chapters. Thirdly, the ways in which the relations at the point of production and the collectivities and ideologies arising from them, impinge on the processes of mediation are explored.

The discussion is divided into one main part and two subsidiary ones. The main part explores in section two, the multi-faceted dynamics of the process of mediation, and the emphasis here is analytical rather than descriptive. The first of the two subsidiary parts examines some major issues in the institutions of mediation, and this discussion is a follow-up to my exposition of these institutions in Chapter 4. This discussion is undertaken in section one. The second subsidiary discussion in section three, explores some of the issues that surround the 1983 strike and its aftermath. Throughout this discussion the 'union' refers to NUPENG unless stated otherwise.

### 10.1. The Terrain of Mediation in Perspective.

In Chapter 3, I discussed two main elements of the terrain of mediation which are vital for the discussion here; viz., the re-organization of trade union between 1976 and 1978, and second the post-1975 'reform of industrial relations'. In case of the latter, I discussed the series of decrees that were promulgated between 1976 and 1978, and the re-organization of the national grievance machinery. In a subsequent development, I discussed the institutions of SIM in Chapter 4. In the subsection on 'Managing Production Politics', I outlined the developments in union/management relations since the unionization of the corporation, in particular the internal grievance procedure and the Procedural Rules in general. The discussion in the rest of this chapter is against those background discussions and Chapter 9.

Some comments on the 1980 Procedural Agreement entered into by NUPENG and the NNPC management, can be made here before discussing the processes of interest mediation. First, from the perspective of the agreement, only the issues of monetary reward are deemed negotiable. All issues of control and direction of the labour process, control and allocation of personnel, etc are solidly defined as the prerogatives of management. Secondly and most significant, all rights of negotiation, declaration of disputes and initiating industrial action were taken away from both the local and branch union leaders and membership, and placed with the national union leadership. Although the general argument of the gap being the 'normative' design of the procedural agreement and



reality will be dealt with later, the premise and implications can be dwelled on a little here.

The thrust of the trade union and industrial relations policies of the 1975-79 Military regime, as I explained in Chapter 3, was to foster 'responsible unionism' and curtail of workplace/union militancy. The upsurge of workplace militancy of 1968-71 as evident in Cohen (1974) and Peace (1979), were often independent of or in defiance of national union leadership. So also was the spate of industrial activism that drummed the Gowon regime out of power. The provision that all powers of declaring disputes and calling industrial actions be concentrated in the hands of the national union leadership, was one of those items insisted upon by the Administrator of Trade Unions in approving the constitution of the new unions. NECA also recommended to its members, the inclusion of the provision in the procedural agreements.

The provisions of the procedural agreement have some implications. First, a formal removal of union members' right to decide whether or not to take industrial action. This is additional to the decrees which in any case make industrial action illegal. Second, in the event of industrial action, there are two interpretations open to management and those exercising state-power: either the action was called by national union leaders or it is unconstitutional. The latter strengthens the hands of the functionaries of state and capital in having the national union leaders denounce the strikers, and then use the powers at their disposal to crush the strike. The alternative is for the national union leaders to stand by their members, which makes it easy to denounce the union leaders and their members as sectarian anarchists and then arrest them; the ideal Catch-22 situation. It is a scenario (if not played out every time) that union members and leaders are perennially saddled with.

A third dimension of the procedural agreement allied to the above, is the undertaking by the Union not to issue press statements or comments unless the grievance procedure had been fully exhausted, or while negotiations are still in progress. The union can, all too often, find itself out-manoeuvred in the media blitz that precede or occur during an industrial action. By making the undertaking, it made itself open to the charge of not keeping faith with the procedural agreement. By contrast, Management with more

media access and a polished public relations outfit, did not make such a promise. Fourth is the affirmation of the principle of 'No work, no pay' in the agreement. Fifth, is the exaltation of the interest of national economy, the need for efficiency and productivity and desire to eschew confrontation. These last two demonstrate the extent to which the union negotiators took managerial criterion for granted.

The other aspects of the procedural rules concern the allocation of the main officials of union/management meetings, which at first glance may look pedestrian. First, in conceding to management, the choice of Chairman at negotiating and consultative levels, the relations of domination, at the level of production which could be (to a degree) subverted at the sphere of mediation, are reinforced. This also affects the direction of face-to-face negotiation. Second, the union also conceded the secretaryship of all meetings to the management side. If the union negotiators felt they were saving the union financial and physical problems of providing someone to take minutes of meetings, (i.e free-loading on management resources) they were unmindful of the price-tag. The drafting of the minutes (or reports) of meetings with the union is frequently influenced by the position the PSD/IRU for instance, want to project to the top management; a process called 'doctoring' in Falomo. This is both central to intra-management politics and disputes in Union/Management meetings about what happened at which meeting. Since the management side was in charge of both the direction of meetings and recording what transpired, the union representatives often find themselves with little or no basis to dispute such issues.

While a number of the key clauses in the agreement were argued by management representatives as existing statutory provisions (hence their inclusion is purely formal), the input of the Union negotiators to the procedural agreement seems minimal. However, NUPENG leadership unlike PENGASSAN's, rejected the exclusion clause which bars personnel in 'essential services' of the corporation from participating in strike actions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In PENGASSAN's case those excluded are personnel in Security, Fire & Safety, Communications, Medical and Industrial Relations units. Confidential Secretaries and Personal Assistants to the senior managers are also affected by the exclusion clause.



## 10.2. The Processes of Interest Mediation.

A central element of this discussion is the character of NNPC as a unit of State-capital. This sets not only the limits of concessions that can be wrung from the management, but also the overall 'atmosphere' of negotiation. However, the nature of 'concession' argued for by the middle-level management responsible for industrial relations, often has a hidden agenda; it allows for a 'bumping' effect on the benefits of management staff themselves. While one has to root the sphere of interest mediation in production relations, the former is 'imbued' with its specific dynamics which has to be understood separately. A number of the issues germane to the discussion here were raised in Chapter 9, with an emphasis on their implications for relations within the union. By contrast, the emphasis here is on how such issues help our understanding of the relations at the sphere of interest mediation.

### 10.2.1. State, Bureaucracy and Production Politics.

In discussing the Internal Labour Market (ch.6), I made reference to the implications of the state-capital dimension for internal production politics. As a public sector organization, relations within the corporation are often subject to both direct or indirect pressures from the Civil Service hierarchy or the government. The direct pressure takes the form of referral of a negotiated agreement to the Office of the President for approval in the absence of a Board of Directors; or the issuance of instructions to the Chief Executive of the corporation -as a public sector department- on the conduct of industrial relations, or direct intervention by the Office of the President in the case of industrial action by the corporation's workers. In June 1981, the Secretary to the Federal Government issued the instruction through the Head of the Civil Service to the Heads of public sector establishments' chief executives, that henceforth the principle of 'No Work No Pay' be strictly adhered to in cases of industrial action.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the indirect pressure of staying in line with the rest of the public sector, takes the form of the selective use of the rest of the public sector as reference point during negotiation or industrial

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<sup>2</sup> This followed the General Strike called by the NLC in the previous month. In 1980 (4 June) a similar letter; outlining the grievance procedure and demanding strict adherence to it, was issued by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour to all heads of government departments and parastatals.

action. Furthermore, because the Minister of Petroleum Resources is simultaneously the Chairman of the corporation and a senior member of the government, the corporation's production politics is situated directly within the context of public sector pay and status differential (vide Otobo 1986), and the preferences of the government in power.

The first indication of the effects of public sector bureaucracy on processes of mediation within the NNPC, emerged with the first round of negotiations in 1980. This produced an agreement on an initial revision of some pay and conditions items; which include the housing, transport, annual leave allowances and the provision of car loan, etc. Since the Board of Directors had been suspended in April 1980, the recommendations were referred to the Office of the President for approval.<sup>3</sup> In the opening paragraph of the cover note, the Acting Managing Director of the corporation argued that the allowances be tied to what obtains in the rest of the oil industry. Although the issue will be discussed in full later, the 'hidden agenda' in the readiness of the management to make the recommendations needs pointing out. The issue of harmonizing the pay and conditions of service of the senior management in NNPC with the transnational oil firms', had been voiced in the management hierarchy before unionization. So while for instance recommending an increase of between 20 and 30 naira for junior staff in housing allowance, 60 naira was recommended for junior and middle management and 90 naira for senior management. Significantly the recommendation for the provision of domestic servants for Deputy Managers and Managers was made as part of the whole package.

In line with the civil service protocol, the demand for the approval was sent through the Head of the Civil Service, who was later asked by the President's Adviser on Petroleum and Energy to comment on the recommended increases. The recommendation on Housing allowance was granted because it was the lowest in the industry while the provision of domestic servants was turned down. The Head of Service insisted that 'in the public service, only the Chief Executives, i.e. the Permanent Secretaries and Directors or General Managers of Parastatals are entitled to only two domestic staff'. The Office of President based its reply on these comments. In accepting, in principle, that a maximum

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<sup>3</sup> As I explained in Chapter 4, the President's Office took over the role of the Board of Directors.



wage increases of 15% and 10% for junior and senior staff respectively be used in negotiating with NUPENG, the Office of President provided the umbrella for the wage rise that the management of NNPC felt was due to itself. As Otobo (1986) points out, the contention for dominance among the fragments of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the maintenance of that dominance is vital in understanding 'the magnitude of remuneration in the public sector' (p.118).

Even with the Board in existence, the situation is not appreciably different. In the first instance, the statutory provision of having the Permanent Secretaries of the Federal Ministries of Finance and National Development on the board of the corporation, means that when negotiated agreements are referred to the board for approval, the issue of comparability -with the rest of the public service- is also raised. The demand by PENGASSAN in July 1982 for a review of the salary structure was rejected by the Board of Directors precisely on this ground. The Minister for Petroleum also turned down NUPENG's demands, in 1985, for negotiation of a new collective agreement. As a member of the government and given the state of the economy, he said he could not justify it to the regime. The Minister increasingly became the voice of the government not only on issues of corporate finance and investment but production politics.

Finally, the Incomes Policy Guidelines issued annually, require public sector establishments to submit their collective agreements to the Head of Service for approval. This is without prejudice to the statutory powers of the Minister for Labour to whom all collective agreements have to be submitted for ratification (see Chapter 3). The argument that the oil industry remuneration structure should be used as the reference point for NNPC, is part of the intra-public sector squabbles and part of the hidden agenda that procedural -or 'substantive'- agreements cannot reveal. The same issue of the corporation as a public sector enterprise, enters the 'language of negotiation' in stalling union demands or employing the repressive arms of the State.

#### 10.2.2. The Dynamics of Interest Mediation.

A central aspect of the process of interest mediation is the nature of power relations. This becomes most evident at the level of individual grievance procedure which

presents the individual worker as being in position to prosecute a grievance. However as is evident in the earlier discussion of shopfloor lives, the idea of an individual worker taking on a supervisor -beside a blind explosion of anger- is limited. Not only is over-ruling a supervisor who disciplines a worker, seen as undermining his/her authority (vide Ch.6), but as a process worker notes, challenging a supervisor is like taking a tiger by the tail. In the five years between 1981 and 1986, there is not a single case -in Warri or Falomo- of the successful use of the individual procedure within the framework of the agreement. When the procedure is utilized, it involves a local union official (steward) from the outset, and the disposition of the steward is very vital. Where in the case of Onwugbenu -in Warri- 'direct intervention' is the favoured method, others prefer asking the worker to submit a written complaint on the basis of which the issue is taken up with the appropriate officer. But as noted in Chapter 9, the union steward is involved in deciding which complaints are worth pursuing and at what price. The preferences of the union leaders become a significant factor in grievance processing. Whilst the question of 'bare-faced cheating' of a worker might spur a steward into action, violation of safety regulations, 'sleeping on duty', fiddling with the attendance card or alleged theft are often regarded as without any justification, hence not worth pursuing. The (degree of) guilt of the worker is taken for granted, as is the relation of the degree of punishment to the offence. The union steward, as Hyman (1984) amply demonstrates, needs to be seen as a 'mediating' force in the process of grievance handling. In other words, the individual worker's capacity to 'utilize' the procedure, is not just hampered by the relations of domination implicit in the production relations but also by the steward's evaluation. This does not mean however that this is an 'incorporationist' process; as I explained in Chapter 9, apart from reflecting the general disposition among the members, the Steward is often a 'dynamizing' force.

In the context of daily individual and undeclared<sup>4</sup> collective grievances which local stewards have to cope with, adherence to the procedural rules is often a handicap. In

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<sup>4</sup> Most 'grievances' cannot be categorized as individual or collective, in the way envisaged by the procedural agreement; provision or improvement of transport or canteen facilities are at once consultative items and at the same time grievance issues. Their articulation takes the forms of undeclared grievances, which could boil over into collective action.



many cases, the perishable nature of the grievance means the only guarantee for success is to abandon the rules. At the level of individual grievances, I have illustrated the tactics of 'direct intervention' in the preceding chapter. A case with collective implications happened in late 1982 at Warri: following the July strike of PENGASSAN members, the Refinery management decided to issue new identity cards. The new cards were to have different background colours for NUPENG and PENGASSAN members; from the point of view of NUPENG members, this was a prelude to the intensification of the discrimination against them. As the local union secretary pointed out, the plan would make it easy for junior workers to be distinguished from senior staffs. The implications for discrimination in provision of services, in the clinic, etc., against junior workers are limitless.

The circular -from the Head of Security- informing the workers of the change, came out on a Thursday with the issuance of the new card slated for the following week. The union chairman and the secretary, immediately stormed the Industrial Relations chief's office demanding the withdrawal of the plan. They got no satisfactory answer and proceeded to the office of the Head of Administration with the same result. A union executive meeting the following day, decided to instruct the members to boycott the card issuance process. A mass meeting the following Monday, endorsed the executive's decision. After a series of negotiations with management, the decision to have different background colours was abandoned, in favour of having union names stamped at the back of the card. As the union leaders put it, to attempt following the procedure would have meant that by the time they sat down with the management, the cards would have been issued, making their position redundant.

It is not only on procedural steps that practice confounds the set pattern of the agreement, but also on the boundaries between issues of managerial prerogatives (therefore not negotiable) and negotiable items. In procedural terms, discipline is a prerogative of management, however over the years, it remains one of the major flare points at local levels. In February 1983 for instance, workers at the Ughelli Gas section went on strike in support of a driver-colleague dismissed for allegedly flouting a General Manager's instruction. If discipline was a managerial prerogative, the circumstances surrounding its execution, were 'fraught with harassment and intimidation of the worst or-

der'.<sup>5</sup> The driver's immediate boss, whose instruction the former was obeying only got re-deployed. As in other cases, the local Unit took action on their own initiative regardless of the procedural rules. The action as in others cases, followed the issuance of a 21-day ultimatum to management, at the expiration of which the grievance still remained unresolved. The idea of managerial prerogative or that a local action is 'unconstitutional' (in the face of shopfloor moral indignation) is often seen as a dubious managerial ploy. In any case as a union leader puts it;

the secret is if you call a strike that all the workers want. Done!. It's legal[...] But when you organize strike, nobody turns up. Oh!, that's when it's illegal.

The management's reaction, as in other cases, was to invoke the procedural rules, pronounce the actions illegal and pull the branch or national leaders in to quell the actions. There is no guarantee that this will succeed.

### **The Pattern of Negotiation.**

Negotiations in the corporation have, over the years, developed a distinct pattern of their own that has little to do with procedural rules. In initiating negotiation, both NUPENG and PENGASSAN have since 1980 followed the pattern of submitting a 'Charter of Demand', although the form of the 'Charter' differs from time to time. In 1980 for instance, it was a two-page demand by NUPENG, while in 1981 and 1982 PENGASSAN and NUPENG each submitted detailed demands in mimeographed-booklet form. And in all the cases, the demands were drawn up independent of the national unions. There are hardly union meetings in which demands are debated prior to their submission. Demands flow from the daily arguments, discussions and shopfloor pressure on union leaders. To search for pre-negotiation union meetings -at which demands are debated- and in their absence assume that union leaders are unrepresentative of the members' views, will be missing the basis of opinion mobilization. On every occasion that a 'charter' was submitted, the management's response has been to stonewall the unions. The unions then have to deliver an ultimatum -the 1983 abortive negotiation inclusive- backed by the threat of industrial

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<sup>5</sup> Letter issued to the MD by the Unit leaders at the start of the action (16 Feb 1983).



action. In September 1981 for instance, the NUPENG branch called for negotiation, which only happened in February 1982, when the union threatened industrial action. The effect is a prevalent perception of the management as normally belligerent, yielding only under threat, a view by no means peculiar to union leaders.<sup>6</sup>

Where the management eventually decide to negotiate, the IRU would run a survey of the going rates of pay and conditions in the industry. The survey forms the basis of the recommendations made to the top management -or the Board in form of memorandum-. On a more permanent basis, recommendations on response to the unions are often based on a 'low intensity intelligence gathering' process. In the refinery for instance, there is a regular monitoring of union meetings and shopfloor feelings by the security department. This is often supplemented by keeping records on union leaders; place of residence, grades, qualifications, etc; this as will be clear below, can become the basis of arrests during industrial action. On the Union's side, it is not unusual for the minutes of Board meetings to filter down to the union leaders. Unlike management however, the union neither has the state repressive apparatus at its beck and call, nor ex-state intelligence forces personnel on its payroll. However central to the process of collective relations and negotiation, is what one many call the language of representation, and it is to this I now turn.

### The Language of Representation.

A striking feature of the management representatives' approach to negotiation is what one may call the 'cerebral' approach: considerable emphasis is placed on the tightness of the logic of an argument, rather than its substance. The union stewards are requested to enter into the terrain sanitized social discourse; devoid of passion or emotion-laden disposition, and finding solutions to problem in a 'civilized' manner. In a number of instances, the union representatives are rebuked; "we've gone beyond the table banging era". This is not necessarily mischief-making, and it needs to be located within the petty-

<sup>6</sup> 71.8% of the respondents to the survey believed that 'Management is often not prepared to take action on workers' grievances unless backed by the threat of industrial action' (Q.22(16)). Among NUPENG members it rises to 82.2%, and there is no significant difference across departments:  $X^2=13.19$ ,  $df=15$ , sig at 0.587.

bourgeois training of the management personnel; a pseudo-intellectualism which equates passionate commitment with irrationality. In cases of this nature, the union steward who fancies himself as thinker; a cerebral rather than a gut activist, is in danger of being mowed down. The way the earlier mentioned dispute over identity cards was resolved illustrates the point. At the end of a protracted negotiation, the head of Administration - leading the management side- suggested that the name of the individual's union be stamped at the back of the identity cards. As Uzegbu puts;

We rejected it. "To hell, it's just the same thing, you're telling the whole world this man is junior staff that one is senior staff". But somehow the management cashed in on that[...], he turned and said "But you belong to NUPENG. Are you saying that you are not proud of your Union..?" We said "No, we're proud of our Union". He said, "Okay, why are you rejecting bearing the inscription on your identity card?." Then, you know at that point we were caught hands down. There was no way we could move. We said, "Okay, that's all right, eh... So long as it is at the rear."

The question of the potential for discrimination against junior workers which was the basis of the opposition to the plan, was lost in the process of negotiation. Which raised another dimension; that of compromise being presented as the end of industrial relations. The invocation of 'the spirit of give and take' -the essence of the issue regardless- is a significant element in the repertoire of management's language of negotiation.

The other dimension of the emphasis on cerebral potency, is that it may involve a conscious manipulation of intellectual-cultural resources, by management negotiators. This was amply illustrated during an NJCC meeting at Port-Harcourt in June 1985. The Union raised the issue of lack of legal support from the corporation for Drivers, who incur criminal liability in the course of their normal duties. There was the case of a driver from Falomo, who on an official trip to Kaduna knocked down a child who later died. He could neither afford legal representation nor had any official support from the corporation; he ended up in jail. For the union side, it was bad enough that lack of legal support undermined whatever case the drivers might have, but that these people were on official duties and their employer was turning its back on them was in the word of the branch chairman, 'extremely unfair'.



Responding for the management's side was the Head of Personnel in the corporation's Warri Branch Office, a lawyer by training. He went into a detailed explanation of the legal principle of separation of powers, and finished by saying that since NNPC, the Police and Judiciary were all arms of the same government, it would amount to the violation of the principle of separation of powers if the NNPC's management 'intervene' in what is a criminal case involving the Police and the Courts!. All the time this 'explanation' was going, a cloud of bewilderment and rapt attention hung over the union side. When the lawyer finished, someone on the union's side responded; 'but it's not fair'; fair or not, replied the lawyer, 'that is the law'. As it turned out, it was a deliberate side-stepping of the issue and dubious 'legal' argument,<sup>7</sup> but apart from appeals for management to offer help of any sort in the future, that was the end of the matter. In this as in many other cases -the negotiation on work hazards in 1982, for instance- it is the ignorance of the union stewards on the technicalities of the issue being contested that is exploited.

The language of negotiation is by no means purely intellectual. On the mild side, is the appeal to the public sector character of the corporation or the state of the economy to justify management's refusal to accede to union demands. In 1983 and particularly in 1985, this was the main thrust of the management argument in refusing to reopen negotiation. The procedural agreement is also usually invoked by the management when it either preferred not to negotiate or was unable to contain local activism. However more serious is the threat to use statutes like the Petroleum (Anti-Sabotage) decree against local union leaders. This is apart from the actual mobilization of the Police or Para-Military forces against unionists which will be discussed later. In 1980, when the Lagos unit threatened to call out the members in support of the national President who was under threat of suspension by Agip, (see Chapter 9) the Personnel Manager brought the unit

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<sup>7</sup> I met him after the meeting and asked if the rule of 'vicarious liability' might not be a case for the union; he looked at me, smiled and said 'Forget about it...'. Furthermore section 14 of NNPC's enabling law actually recognizes the situation and says the corporation 'shall be indemnified [...] against any liability incurred [...] in defending any proceedings whether civil or criminal'.

Secretary into his office, invoking the decree's death penalty as deterrence against the proposed action.

On the union's side, a striking element of its language of representation at the local or branch union level, is the 'earthy' gut feelings touched on in the last chapter. Some of the union demands defy the kind of 'coherent' articulation of 'rational' ideas that the management's side often push. The demands which led to the 1983 strike, were for instance based on gut morality of the shopfloor, rather than the logic of 'legal agreements'. Sometimes the demands are based on the centrality of the corporation workforce to the national economy; a case of NNPC's self-publicity campaigns coming home to roost. The demand, during a Warri zonal JCC meeting, that the corporation's staff (children's) school be made easily accessible to junior workers' children derived from this. If such a facility was available to workers in the state-owned steel plant in Warri for instance, which subsists 'on the oil money produced by NNPC workers', then the same should hold for the corporation's workers. In the effort to reopen the collective agreement for negotiation, in 1985, the Branch union's argument was that;

in spite of the economic depression, all companies in the industry that depend solely on the NNPC for their existence continue to declare huge after tax profit and their staff are being adequately compensated. (emphases mine)

Given that NNPC does not issue annual reports making difficult any talk of profit margin, the reference to the other oil firms ('dependent') on NNPC is as far-fetched as it may sound.

At other times, the argument is based on the shopfloor gut experience of the work rather than relying on what the experts want them to believe, a case illustrated by the demands on work hazards in 1982. As the Branch Chairman at the time said, the Refinery Manager of Warri who was brought in for the management's side, went on about a dozen and one chemical formulae and their non-toxicity, leaving them bewildered. But the only thing to fall back on was the fact that they were the people who experience the polluted work environment. They may not have the power of fancy talk and "big big grammar", but they knew if it made them feel bad, it had to be bad for them, and they insisted on having an 'outside expert' look into the situation. In the case of provision of legal aid cited



above, it is important to note the response of one of the union stewards; "but it's not fair", after all the lawyer's cerebral stunts.

Most of the time however, it is a general notion of justice, fairness or equity which is the basis of the arguments. Demands for reinstatement of sacked colleagues, health and welfare issues, and on pay and benefits have behind them the passion of the shopfloor ethos and the 'alternative morality' discussed earlier. The notion of fairness is not however limited to the union membership. In 1980 for instance, the union took onboard the issue that casual workers be converted into full-time workers. In the refinery also, one of the issues that the local union pushed through the management was that the Ekpan and Jeddo villagers -who do menial works in the refinery under the 'development project' schemes (vide Ch.5)- should be accorded the normal rights of a full-time worker, like canteens meals, provision of safety wares, etc. In the two cases, the group being defended were neither nominally NUPENG members nor do they pay union dues, but as the local unit chairman puts it; 'We are all human beings, we are all the same.' The ethos is rooted in the spirit of collectivism which as I explained in Chapter 8, goes beyond the labour process environment.

Faced, as often as they are, with the tendency to stonewall, resorts to dubious intellectualism, threats and outright belligerence, one can understand the cynicism of many union stewards and members. Even in situations where the management's claim may have substance, it often looks like just another gobble-dygook. As stated in the 1985 charter; "It is when the union submits items for negotiation that the corporation remember there is economic depression." It is an opinion widely shared among the refinery workers (see Note 6). Sometimes however, it is seen partly as a problem accentuated by the Industrial Relations personnel. As Douglass, a process worker and union executive member for 2 years notes;

Deh wan' keep good face wit' di workers and also wan' keep good face wit' management. And because some of dem wan' become managers now, deh no'o tell management di bitter truth.

They want to be in the good books of the workers and management at the same time. And because some of them want rapid promotion, they won't tell the management the bitter truth.

This raises two distinct issues; first, there is the issue of the nature of internal differentiation within the 'Management', and the indeterminacy of the category as often used in industrial relations literature. The second, more germane to the issue of the language of representation, is the role of deference in the processes of mediation. Douglass's statement is perhaps not derived from deference for (top) 'management' but it impinges on it. It is to this that I now turn.

### **Deference and the Language of Representation.**

On 9 March 1981, a circular was sent by the General Manager (Personnel & Services) to all staff in Falomo on GL 09 and above: they were to attend a meeting with the Acting Managing Director (Ag. MD) the following afternoon at 1630. The Ag MD delivered a scathing address on disregard among the staff for punctuality, official closing time and 'considerable loss of time during lunch' hours. 'Many senior staff' he said 'are guilty of [these offences] and by their scandalous example they encouraged junior staff working under them to break the rules'. The Ag. MD then outlined a new disciplinary guideline. It was to say the least a very humiliating experience for many of the senior officers at the meeting. An internal memo (paraphrasing the Ag. MD's guidelines) was issued by the Personnel and Services Division(PSD), under the name of the General Manager but signed by a more junior officer was later released. The local PENGASSAN responded with a release to its members attacking the PSD memo;

the Association views with grave concern the situation the memo seeks to create and regrets that Management should consider it fit to demean and degrade Senior Staff. We have taken the matter up at the highest quarters [...] Meanwhile, we appeal to all senior staff to keep calm in the face of this provocation.

The Union's response ignored the Ag. MD's address and took issues with the memo initialed by a more junior officer, despite the former being the real source of the memo. As it turned out, the 'highest quarters' with which the matter was to be taken up was the Ag. MD himself. It illustrates an aspect of the process of interest mediation: while the union leaders are ready to square up to the middle and junior management personnel, there is a reluctance to engage directly with the chief executives of the operating locations (like the refinery) or the Managing Director (MD). As in this case and the encounter



between the local NUPENG leaders and the new General Manager of the Refinery and the Minister on the promotion issue (vide Ch.9), it is not simply a case of prudence, i.e leaving the options of the union open in case they need to go beyond the lower rank officers to resolve a problem. Prudence is of course a necessary aspect of the process of mediation, and there is always the danger that one would mistake it for deference. However, the element of deference to the top management persons, defines not only the readiness of the union stewards to take the words of the chief executives at their face value, as in the promotion issue, but also to refrain from directly attacking them even when the issues that are the bones of contention originated from them as in the above case. The only exception on record was the counter-instruction that Lagos unit NUPENG leaders issued, when the Ag. MD directed that no-one should leave the office-premises until his return from his swearing-in ceremony in 1980.

Although the discussion so far has centred on branch and local union leaders, the national union leaders themselves, not immune to the 'Deference Factor'. In the negotiations that followed the Ughelli Gas workers' strike (vide above), the national union leaders were brought in. The Deputy General Secretary who represented the national union, was quite satisfied to take the General Manager's (Gas Division) words for it, when the latter said he would look into the Drivers' case, but refused to give an undertaking that the Driver would be reinstated. As it turned out, the man was not reinstated. In all the interviews with the General Secretary of the Union, there was always the implicit restriction of the blame for unsuccessful negotiations to the IRU staff or the Personnel Manager; even when it was clear the latter were acting on a MD's instructions. The implication of this at the refinery level for instance, is that the intervention of the General Manager, by way of sitting-in on the first minutes of, say a consultative meeting, was enough on a number of occasions to make the union side agree to a ('compromise') deal they previously opposed.

I noted in the last chapter, a significant aspect is the larger-than-life aura which surrounds the positions occupied by these people; a situation rooted in a wider cultural context. However, many of the top management personnel go out of their way to cultivate and reproduce this factor. For one thing, a worker could be in the refinery or

the corporation all his/her working life without coming into face to face contact with the Minister or the chief executive. The top management are seldom directly involved with the union representatives. During the periodic contacts with the union leaders, the Minister and the Refinery's GM for instance, assume the status of a monarch granting audience to his subjects' representatives. The first MD however operated an 'open door policy'<sup>8</sup> with the union leaders. They could come in and see him if they felt Personnel or IRU was creating a bottle-neck. Apart from the inter-corporate politics dimension of this policy to be discussed later, it actually seemed to accentuate the deference factor in the relation between the MD and the union leaders. Discussion with some of the local union leaders at the time revealed something close to personal loyalty. The relation reflects the definition of the role of the head of the corporation like that of a lineage head: who resolves conflicts between the lineage members and is deferred to. While some union demands are met in this way, the basis of production relations in commoditized labour-power is denied.<sup>9</sup>

It is not only in relations with the chief executives that one comes across the 'deference factor'. The notion that collective bargaining somehow neutralizes differential in power of production relations, is hard to sustain here. Even at the moments of heated arguments with management representatives, the union stewards stick to the suffix 'Sir'. It is not just, as Dudun was advised (vide Ch.9), that a union steward only has the union strength behind him for the duration of his term of office; it reflects the everyday class relations of the shopfloor. However, the traditional cultural demand of respect for age, reconstituted under colonial and post-colonial capitalism as deference for people in 'superior' positions, if not 'social superiors', is a potent element of this deference. In telling the Union Secretary that the fact that they were involved in union-management relations did not give the latter 'the license to be rude' to him, the Head of IRD in Warri was invoking the traditional respect due to him as an elder person to the Secretary.

<sup>8</sup> In the vocabulary of Nigerian politics, the 'policy' describes the semblance of consultation by a military regime, with the key petty-bourgeois elements, academics, labour leaders and neo-feudal chieftains.

<sup>9</sup> This process parallels the ideology of developmentalism at the national level (Hutchful 1986), but is prevalent in low-capitalized indigenous establishments. See Waterman's (1982:139-50) discussion of the relations in the Biney cargo handling firm.



The other dimension of Douglass's statement noted above is the issue of indeterminacy of the category of 'management'. An element of this is what I earlier referred to as the 'hidden agenda' of negotiation. It is to this that I now turn.

### **Production Politics & the Hidden Agenda.**

A central dimension in the relationship between the senior management of NNPC and the civil service or state hierarchy is the question of relative pay and benefits, and within NNPC management, comparison of remuneration with the transnational sector remained a pet-subject. Before unionization in 1980, the only way to have improved pay and conditions was through a salary review panel, but the wage policy of the military regime between 1977 and 1979 was least inclined to such ideas. Pay comparability however, remained a potent, if hidden agenda. In 1980, as cited above, the Ag. MD's papers to the Office of the President, asked among other things, for permission to use the 15% and 10% (for those earning below and above 3,000 naira per annum respectively) as the limit of negotiation with the union. The request followed a union demand for the application of the percentage rise in pay, which the Incomes Policy Guidelines recommended as the maximum wage increase allowed for 1980.

Although the union's interpretation of the guideline -as a direct pay rise- was wrong, the management did not oppose it. As it turned out, the granting of the Ag. MD's recommendation provided the basis for a blanket pay rise in the corporation. The MD's pay rose by 2,400 naira a year, the General Managers' and Managers' by 2,016 and 1,836 naira respectively. The junior workers had between 324 and 636 naira in pay rise.

The agreement with PENGASSAN in July 1982 became the basis of a Board memorandum -in November- for improved conditions for the senior management. Among the recommendations was the 500 and 600 naira monthly housing allowance for staff on GL.7 and 6, and GL.5 and 4 respectively. This was more than double the amount awarded to PENGASSAN members. The demand for domestic staff, rejected by the Head of Service in 1980, was resubmitted. General Managers would be paid 250 naira per month for domestic servants, and staff on GL.7 to 5; 125 naira. Although the recommendation on housing allowance was rejected by the Board -most top management staff live in corpora-

tion houses anyway-, the Board memo was the basis of the provision of free electricity, water and telephone bills under 500 naira per annum, among other items for the top management. In negotiating with the unions therefore, the management staff are themselves involved in opening up avenues for their own rises. Even the Personnel department recommended that the Board should get the government to ban unions from NNPC, a case was simultaneously made for linking NNPC's pay and conditions with what exist in the TNC sector of the industry. This was also the case when the Warri Refinery management put forward a comprehensive plan of action to thwart the effect of industrial actions on production.

Consensus between management negotiators and the Senior Management or those in other departments, on issues of benefits does not always exist. This is often the daily aspect of both the inter-management politics and the hidden agenda of interest mediation. Here, while the union leaders may or may not be pushing for certain issues, the Industrial Relations personnel may be fighting the rear-guard battle inside the management. The recommendation for a cut in travelling allowances proposed by the Organization and Training department of the Warri Refinery in 1985 for instance, was squashed by the Head of Industrial Relations. This is because Industrial Relations personnel and union leaders are the ones who had most to lose by the recommendation. It is also not unlikely for the IRU to enlist the support of the union leaders in the fight to upgrade the IRU into full departmental status. This is part of the relations of dependence in which union and management representatives as adversaries are involved, which is expressed in some peculiar ways. To strengthen the bargaining hands of the local union leaders, contents of internal management discussion on negotiation, have on occasions, been leaked to the union side. On both occasions, the top management was taking a stand which was going to limit the scope for middle and junior management benefits. The frontline management negotiators are themselves in these management groups. If in Carchedi's (1975) schema, the contradiction of a combined performance 'of both the global function of capital and the function of the collective worker' (p.1) defines the nature of the 'new middle class', the junior and middle management in the corporation reflect this. In addition, this group de-



pend on the exchange-value of their labour-power for subsistence in ways that the top management are not.

The initiative is however not always from the management side. Union leaders often seize on either the vertical or departmental segmentation within Management in strengthening their negotiating hand against the Personnel and IRU. Earlier, I cited the relations between the first MD and the union leaders. The forum was used by the union leaders on many occasions to censure the IRU. In effort to out-manoeuvre the IRU, some of the leaders would brief some other Managers prior to the management monthly meetings. This is in the hope that some of these Managers would provide alternative voices to the Personnel Manager at the meetings, especially in the light of what some of the union leaders saw as the misrepresentation of the union by Personnel. On the other hand, it provided the union room to manoeuvre when negotiation broke down. As Obasi puts it;

I got the [Public Affairs] Manager involved in trade union matters, so that if we had a problem he can't just run to the Press and start discrediting us, because we fed him in, in confidence. If anything happened we go and tell him 'Your people have started again'. Yeah!. If he goes, then we discredit him; 'At so-and-so date we met you and told you'. That kind of a thing.

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this tactic worked in the union's favour.

Furthermore, it reflects the dependence of the union leaders -even a militant one- on the Managerial power structure. Whatever the nature of the relations of the sphere of interest mediation to the class and group relations at both the levels of society and the specific point of production, the peculiarities of the sphere of interest mediation set it apart from other levels of social relations. In the preceding discussion, I have touched on some of this, but it is to a specific discussion of it that I now turn.

### **The Peculiarities of the Sphere of Interest Mediation.**

Evident in the relations between union leaders and industrial relations staff is one similar to that described by Hyman (1972). Namely, the relaxed and jovial interpersonal relations between union and management negotiators before negotiation commenced vis-a-vis the 'aggressive performance' during negotiation (Hyman 1972:56-9), explained in terms of Goffman's (1961) concept of 'role distancing'. On a more permanent basis in

some instances, is a relationship of intense personal hostility or close cordiality. However, even in a case of a hostile and aggressive prosecution of demands or negotiation, is something akin to 'Stockholm syndrome', except it is difficult in this case, to distinguish hostage from the captor. A sustained personal relationship between two 'adversaries' generates a situation in which the 'qualities' of the individual representatives (good or bad) are distinguished from their activities as spokesmen of different constituencies. One often find management representatives talking respectfully, almost with a touch of nostalgia, of this or that union steward with whom they had a very turbulent relationship and vice-versa: his capacity to 'think fast on his feet', his relentless pursuance of issues or cunning. In a sense a sustained relationship -for as long as each is the representative- also seems to underscore the tendency to create a mental distinction between the individuality of the steward or industrial relations officer and the roles they 'fill in'. It is not unusual to have a meeting full of acrimonious arguments and immediately after, to find the union and management representatives happily discussing the strategy of a forthcoming delegate conference. By the same token, a union steward can have an angry session with the IRD staff, and a day later the same steward will come in for another issue (or even the old one) without the lightest hint of the previous day's rancor. However as I indicated earlier, it is the union that is mostly threatened in this circumstance. Most obvious is that of a leadership gradually disengaged from its membership and which begins to define itself in militaristic terms.

A related dimension of the 'Stockholm syndrome' is partly a derivative of mutual dependence between union stewards and industrial relations staff which generates a community of interest separate from their constituencies. There are two aspects to this; first, is the dependence of the local unions on management patronage in meeting the costs of union activities, as I noted in Chapter 9. Second, is a case of shared interest between the Union's national officers and the IRU officials on procedural rules and the demand that the local union should not 'usurp' the powers of the national union on initiation of disputes or calling industrial action. On a number of occasions, the national secretariat responded positively to IRU's calls that local unions initiating industrial actions be censured.



In a number of cases, the branch or local officials showed similar commitment to following the 'procedure' which at least on one occasion in Lagos, put the local stewards in confrontation with some of their members. In this case, the Typists and Stenographers in Falomo, in response to a national award (for increased wage restructuring), granted to the civil service stenographers' union, demanded a similar adjustment in their pay. It was the local union that had to explain the non-relevance of a civil service award for the corporation workers, ending in a protracted battle with the steno-typists. There is however no guarantee that bringing union leaders to quell a local revolt will work, a situation illustrated by the Ughelli Gas workers' strike. The Personnel Manager, in Lagos, despatched some branch leaders to call off the strike. The latter after listening to the workers, went on to increase the scope of the union demands and threatened to call the rest of the branch out in sympathy action.

One peculiar dimension of the sphere of mediation for the Union (leaders) is what Crouch (1982:174) referred to as 'procedural goals'. The very idea that the union leaders are making decisions with Managers, the top management or the Minister[!], on aspects of work relations, sets the leaders apart from the members. While members measure the processes of interest mediation mainly in terms of tangible results, many union leaders find significant appeal in the very process of sharing power with the 'big men'. This is particularly so at the branch level, where the union leaders have access to corporation aircraft, generous travelling allowances and hotel accommodation and meals during meetings with management or training sessions. Although referred to by a union leader as a periodic escape from the drudgery of everyday shopfloor existence, it underscores some of the different dispositions of leaders and members, to the processes of mediation. Participation in the process itself, as Burawoy (1979) would say, generates the leadership's commitment to the institutions of mediation. This is apart from the affable inter-personal relations that may emerge between the union and management spokesmen.

Since most collective grievances are handled through the institutions of mediation, working the system produces its own distinct rules. Pursuing a particular demand in the face of resolute management opposition may, for instance, be regarded as imprudent. In Warri, the demand for the resumption of bussing facilities for workers living in Ughelli -

an adjacent town- was abandoned by the 1982-84 leadership. As the union chairman puts it, there was no sense in pursuing a case on which the management said it was not in a position to offer a solution. Since his stewardship would be judged partly by the amount of concessions won from management, it was not politically prudent for him to continue flogging the issue.

One of the more significant dimensions of the sphere of mediation is the spill-over of interest articulation into collective action: not just in giving form and expression to demand, but in the dialectical effects of the actions on union and workplace collectivities. It is to this I now turn.

### 10.3. The 1983 Strike and After.

I outlined the 1983 strike in Chapter 9 primarily with an the intra-union relations; while not repeating the narrative, some of the aspects of the strike can be discussed here. A central element in the demands made at the time is, as I explained before, rooted in the alternative morality of the shopfloor. While the national leadership was confronted with the dilemma of mediating the issues affecting different clusters of the membership, it did not fully appreciate both the strength and premise of the morality of the shopfloor. On the leadership's side, the ethos of commitment to a signed collective agreement, until its expiration, co-existed with the distinction between 'class' politics and 'economism'. For the shopfloor members, the issue was one of equity, regardless of what the procedural agreement says. Put within an understanding of the work relations as value relations, it might be difficult to sustain the charge of 'economism' made by the leadership:<sup>10</sup> the demand for equitable remuneration for their expended labour-power is no less of a class issue than the need to defend jobs in other firms. As Sheila Cohen (1987) points, out a distinction between 'struggles of resistance' and the 'struggles of transformation', as Thompson (1983) does, may lose sight of the fact that 'both' are about the same thing: the capitalist relations of production. The local union (leaders and members) of course, knew that management had never negotiated without first stonewalling the union demands; so the refusal to negotiate were interpreted as a re-run of history. This was however, a seri-

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<sup>10</sup> That is putting aside the issue of the President's political ambition.



ous mistake in that the union did not recognize the shift in Management's temperament. For the first time in 1981, the Managing Director of NNPC was appointed from outside the corporation; ending the period of MDs groomed in NNPC's ethos of corporate collective. The new MD and the Board showed little of 'camaraderie' of the previous ones, when it came to the issue of the processes of mediation. This hostility was matched at the level of the State as well.

In February 1982, the Personnel Manager -under the new MD's instruction- had responded to a NUPENG ultimatum in January with the recommendation to the Board that it should get the government to ban unions from NNPC. The increasing hostility of management however became open during the PENGASSAN strike in the middle of the year: the first corporate-wide industrial action the management had ever faced. The Office of the President issued a statement condemning the strike, while Management responded to the strike by threatening to eject all senior staff on strike from the housing complexes, if they did not return to work. There is little doubt that this threat convinced the PENGASSAN leadership to call-off the action. The Warri Refinery management for the first time, put into practice its in-house plan to maintain production if members of either union went on industrial action: NUPENG members and non-unionized management personnel were used to maintain production. After the PENGASSAN strike, the revised version of the 'Strategic Plan' despatched to Falomo for the consideration of the top management. These were the 'temperamental' background to the 1983 strike.

#### 10.3.1. The Strike And After.

The strike as I explained in Chapter 9, was called off by the national leaders within the first week. While most of the refinery workers stayed out for another five days by Monday 28th, the action was collapsing in many locations and the branch leaders, now on their own, had to organize an ordered return. A significant element of the defiance to stay out is that, it was in those areas of the plant where the Lateral Community is strongest that the stay away remained solid, until the official return to work. Throughout Maintenance for instance, the strike was 100% solid, except in Planning where one person returned to work a day before. The union, as I earlier explained, also lost all the issues at

the IAP, and the suspicious circumstances of all the IAP ruling was to unleash a cycle of internal anger and recrimination within the NNPC branch and Warri Refinery unit in particular.(vide Ch.9).

Some of the problems of the industrial action itself need further analysis. The updated version of the 'Strategic Plan of the Warri Refinery management, was put to full use during the 1983 strike: Senior staff workers in the administrative units were deployed to areas like the Truck loading section which was junior staff intensive. The strike coincided with the period of turn around maintenance in Warri Refinery, and therefore there was ample supply of petroleum products in storage; and the failure of the strike to hit the supply of petroleum products also reflected two other major problems. First, the branch was unable to gain the backing of the tanker drivers section of the union. The national secretariat held this group back in anticipation of the wider solidarity action, and refused to reverse this decision even when the NNPC branch union called for the group's support. This was however the minor problem.

The major problem affecting the Warri refinery workers, concerns a shift in the composition of the workforce itself. This shift (see Figure 6.1) means that neither union could go on strike, and by itself hit the production level in any appreciable sense. In 1982, the junior workers were used to fill-in the absent senior workers, in 1983 the reverse was the case. The imperative of collective action, the premise of which already exists in the form of Vertical Community in work, is the only viable alternative. Elements of inter-union solidarity was briefly evident in 1981 when the PENGASSAN leadership instructed their members not to take on the work of junior workers on general strike, on the grounds that the management was trying to use one union against the other. Unfortunately for NUPENG, no such reciprocal instruction came during the PENGASSAN 1982 action. However, since late 1983, the prospect of coordinated action first surfaced in Warri Refinery when the two union leaders met and decided on a joint action in face of possible non-payment of the 13th month pay award, and on that occasion, they got the attention of the management. It was only in February 1986 that a more permanent joint committee was set up in the plant to coordinate the unions' efforts and demands, and there is little doubt that all these flow from their experiences in 1982 and 1983. The setting up of the body in



1986, was also the result of the increasing frustration in both unions about their national leadership: in NUPENG's case, it was the split and rancor in the national union; while in PENGASSAN, it was the docility of the national leadership. The implication of this is that in the absence of national leadership backing, the VC/W is fostering not just cooperation at the level of labour activity and shopfloor politics of production, but struggles at the level of mediation.

The other dimension of the 1983 strike was that for many of the shopfloor workers, it was their first experience of having facing the coercive and ideological onslaught of the functionaries of the State and Capital. This is no doubt responsible for the strong cynicism about Management, the Police, and the Media. The intense feeling of inequity in distributional relations, the alternative morality reported earlier seemed also to have been intensified by the experiences of the strike. By contrast however, the commitment to unionism is quite strong among the members, as I pointed out in Chapter 9; If many seem weary of industrial action, the issue, as someone said during a union meeting in 1985, was to plan it in a better way.

## Conclusion.

While an exposition of the main issues of theory and method of theory raised by this chapter will be delayed until the conclusion, some comments will be necessary at this stage. I have tried to demonstrate the range of issues and processes that impinge on the sphere of interest mediation. To this extent, I have demonstrated the necessity to see NNPC as a unit of state-capital: subject to the vagaries of public sector production politics and intra-bureaucratic bourgeois wrangling. In this instance also, the conduct of the relations of mediation within the corporation, quite easily become issues of the State as well, which is also due to the strategic location of the corporation in the Nigerian economy. While the processes of mediation need to be anchored on production relations, this has to be in a wider sense of the socio-cultural and political relations, rather than the specific domain of labour process -relations which reflect the specific form of the social formation-, in this case a conjuncture of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of (re)production of social life.

The sphere of interest mediation, does however, simply reflect the wider domain of social relations. It not only has its own framework which enables as much as it imposes limitations on the actions of the workers, the union and management: to a significant extent, management has to justify itself within the context of the institutions and processes of mediation. The workers, whatever the limitations imposed on them, have been able to secure advances which might otherwise be difficult to achieve. Its implications for relations between union and management representatives was also demonstrated. No less significant is that the institutions of interest mediation (the Union inclusive) have enabled the construction of a wider constituency of workers beyond the immediate work-group or workplace. This brings together workers of different locations in the corporation; across the industry or nationally, which has enabled the construction of (at the minimal) a proto-class constituency, beyond ethnic or religious boundaries. This in addition reinforces work-group collectivity as well as the generic collective identity as part of an underprivileged bloc in society.



## THE CONCLUSION.

## Chapter 11.

### WORK, WORK RELATIONS & PRODUCTION POLITICS: issues in a peripheral capitalist context.

#### Introduction.

This study, as I explained in Chapter 1, is both exploratory and explicatory in its overall objective. To this extent, while being concerned with a distinct peripheral capitalist context, I have situated the discussion in the preceding chapters against the background of a set of theoretical and empirical works. The effort at this stage is to provide a panoramic discussion of the study. Central to this effort is the Method of Abstraction, which I outlined in Section 5 of Chapter 1, and it is on the basis of this method of theory that I have conducted the discussion so far. While the preceding chapters represent the 'Phase of Individuation', in a one-sided abstraction, this chapter serves as the Phase of Synthesis. Since the method of abstraction is central to my attempt to deal with the specific Nigerian situation, it is important that the discussion of the method of abstraction in Chapter 1 -and my critique of the Labour Process debate in Chapter 2- be seen as directly linked to the discussion here.

This chapter is divided into 3 sections. In section one, I make a short observation on Kozo Uno's outline of the method of abstraction in order to (re-)define my use of it. In section two, I undertake a theoretical discussion of work and work relations within the context of this study. Finally in section three, I pull together the various theoretical strands around the discussion of the Politics of Production; this links the discussion here and the previous chapters back to the issues that prompted the research in the first instance.

#### 11.1. An Observation on the Method of Abstraction.

It is important to point out that mine is not the first attempt to analyse the context of an emergent capitalist society using the method of abstraction. Kozo Uno's (1980)



analysis of the emergence of capitalism in Japan led him to specify the procedure for what he called 'the study of political economy', which he said;

must be conducted at three distinct levels of abstraction, with the pure theory of capitalism at the most abstract level, the empirical analysis of the current state of capitalist economy at the least abstract level, and the stage-theory of capitalist development mediating them. (1980, p.xxiii)

While Uno's work represents a significant contribution, his abstraction is very different to the method of abstraction I outlined in Chapter 1. First, he sees Marx's Capital as a theory of 'pure capitalism'. On the contrary, both the discussion of the metamorphosis of capital and the structure of the three volumes, involve analyses of the levels of abstraction (from the most simple and abstract level to the complex and more concrete) and the use of one-sided abstraction. Describing the 'highest level of abstraction' as the theory of pure capitalism, runs the risk of reducing Marx's method to a logical or speculative abstraction (cf. Sekine 1980, n.d; Albritton 1984). Second, the philosophical aspect of the method, i.e the distinction between the concrete and the appropriation of the concrete processes in thought, is not acknowledged in Uno's schema. Furthermore in Grundrisse (p.108), Marx produced an outline which moves from;

(1) the general, abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society,... (2) The categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society [...] Capital, wage labour, landed property [...] Town and country... Circulation. Credit system. (3) Concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state [...] The "unproductive" classes. Taxes, State debt. Public credit. The population. The colonies. Emigration. (4) The international relation of production. International division of labour. International exchange. Export and import. Rate of Exchange. (5) The world market and crises (p.108)

One may seriously disagree with the level of analysis on which Marx placed certain issues, but two things are clear. First, the recognition in the method of abstraction of the different levels of analysis and the increasing complex mediation of the 'inner structure'.<sup>1</sup> Second, the method needs to be properly grasped to avoid collapsing it with neo-

<sup>1</sup> To avoid the mistake of those who seize every chance to throw barbs at Marx, one should realise that Grundrisse is a work of rough notes, and that increased clarification of analysis separates Grundrisse from Capital and Theories of Surplus Value, e.g the distinction between 'labour' and 'labour-power'.

Kantian or Hegelian method, and at the same time extending its analytical insight. Uno's work clearly did the latter, but at the expense of the former.<sup>2</sup>

## 11.2. State-Capital, Work and Production Relations.

In this section, I will concentrate on the theoretical re-composition of the issues of work and work relations which were dealt with in Chapters 5 to 8. This however requires that we first attempt to locate the unit of capital around which production is organized, i.e state-capital, within the framework of abstraction.

### 11.2.1. State-Capital, Peripheral Capitalism and Production.

At the basis of the analyses in Chapters 4 to 10 is the understanding of the organization of production around a specific form of capital, i.e state-capital. Not just state-capital, but a state-capital in the context of peripheral capitalism. The implications have to be dealt with at distinct levels of abstraction. In the first instance, it is important to re-emphasize that the two primary aspects of the labour process in the Refinery are at once commodity production -in this case petroleum products- and also that the workers' primary position in the process is as bearers of labour-power; a commodity. The social relations in the Refinery are first defined from this perspective. Those in managerial position -the functionaries of capital- are there, in the first instance, to perform the 'global function of capital' (Carchedi 1975). To repeat an earlier quote, 'capital is not [per se] a thing, it is a definite social relation of production' (Marx 1981:953). It is therefore crucial to understand that production is within the context of RSL, a definite capitalist labour process. Whether NNPC produces annual reports or not, whether the Refinery's annual reports adequately reflect its profit/loss situation or not, is of secondary analytical importance at this stage. These considerations are only forms of expressing the processes of commodity production and realization.

However, two related issues mediate the primary relations of production here. One is the ownership of the capital and the other is the peripheral social formation context in which the unit of capital operates. In the first instance, we are not dealing with any unit

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a criticism of Uno. I doubt for instance if he was ever aware of Grundrisse given its recent publication.



of capital but a state-owned or directed capital. This as evident in Chapters 7, 8 and 10 has a number of distinct implications. The first is not just for the direction of production but also the expression of ultimate control over the NNPC and by implication, the Refinery. Second, the form of ownership has contradictory implications for shopfloor relations and the articulation of interest between those performing the global functions of capital and those performing the global functions of labour; the workers. The predominant role of state-capital as I explained in Chapters 3 and 4, must be seen within the context of the absence of a viable indigenous bourgeoisie. The state-directed capitalist investments were, however, defined within a developmental ideology. This means that on the one hand, production had never been judged solely by profitability. This to an extent may explain the relatively relaxed nature of work relations, vis-a-vis Shell for instance - if the testimonies of the ex-Shell workers in the refinery are anything to go by. This does not refute arguments about the implications of RSL for the strict regulation of the expenditure of labour-power. The other dimension of ownership deals with the ideological implications for both the projection of corporate image for the NNPC and the internal articulation of the ideology of work and the promotion of 'corporate citizenship. On the other hand however, the top Managers in NNPC are subject to the vagaries of 'political instability'. The various ramifications of this will be explored further below.

The second broad mediation of the primary Capital/Labour relations as I note above, concerns the peripheral context. This ties in with both the 'developmentalist' ideology of state-capital and the projected corporate image of NNPC as a champion of national technological development, which as I argue in Chapter 8, give form to a distinct ideology of work. Working in NNPC, for many workers, becomes not just commodity production but a contribution to the national development effort as well; this dual image will be explored below. However, the interaction of the non-capitalist and the capitalist modes of the production and reproduction of social life adds a further level of complexity to the basic capital/labour-power relations. These do not only mediate the basic relations but also become modes of expressing the basic relations of production. As issues of different levels of abstraction, the relations we are dealing with are therefore not just

capital/labour-power relations, but at one and the same time historically, culturally and territorially specific.

Behind the analytic concept of peripheral capitalism, is also the understanding of the location of the formation within international capitalism and the imperialist relations which give it its meaning. Some aspects of this at the national level were explored in Chapters 3 and 4. But as we saw the implications for work, and work relations are real on the ground for workers in the refinery, both in terms of the frustrations caused by technological dependence, and the initial ENI management of the plant. The delay in repair jobs or getting the plant back into production because of lack of spare parts is an aspect of the frustration. The other dimension of the peripheral location of the formation was also evident with the handing over of the management of the plant to ENI by the Nigerian government. The effect of this was direct on the shopfloor. We had not just a relation of production but one mediated and largely defined by national and racial issues which pitched most of the indigenous shopfloor workers against the ENI operatives. It is in understanding the relations as multi-layered that we can make sense of the processes involved. Not just a state-capital/labour relation, but one also expressive of the imperialist character of the relation between the Nigerian and Italian functionaries of capital on one hand, and between them and the Nigerians who performed the global functions of labour. The contradictory character of the relations surrounding this state-capital, provided the space for defining the shopfloor struggles in national terms and securing the support of some of the indigenous functionaries of capital. The struggles were also important for the forms that the Lateral and Vertical Communities in Work take in the refinery. The communities as we found out, became central to the mediation of relations of domination at the point of production as well as the workers' union and non-union based struggles. All these are indicative of the complex nature of the social relations 'on the ground', and it is to some aspects of this complex totality that I now turn.



### 11.2.2. Work and the Relations of Production.

Work in the NNPC and the Refinery, as I argued above, is primarily within the context of a RSL<sup>3</sup> and it is important to re-evaluate the implications. The idea of process work as a neat, relaxed and well-paid job is one that is often presented in both academic works, (e.g Blauner 1964) and popular wisdom which was exploited by the NNPC management during the 1983 strike (see Chs.9 & 10). The notion of 'intellectual' rather than manual skill (Sabel 1982:67) would seem to fit process plant jobs. This conception of process work not only idealizes the job of Control Room operators, but does not even comprehend the nature of work in other areas of a Process plant; Maintenance, Plant Operators' work, etc. (Nichols & Beynon 1976, Gallie 1978:79). The stress, the dirt, the perennial work hazards -accidents, noise and chemical pollution- and the disruption that shift work causes to the lives of not just the workers but their families as well; these are the reality of process work for many. The disruption of social life acquires added salience in a context where presence at family or community gatherings, festivities, for instance, is of cultural significance.

For most workers, their position is defined primarily in terms of how they fit as little cogs in the wheel of commodity production. Even when their humanity is officially recognized, it is in terms of how it advances their locations in the production wheel. This is not some grand claim, but one continually present in the workers' own description of their position in the plant.

In the sense that work relations in the refinery are primarily defined as elements of production (in the context of RSL), the workers have experiences similar to those of other Process workers (Blauner 1964, Nichols & Beynon 1976, Gallie, 1978). The very process of work or production involves the regulation and direction of the workers. This is not incidental to the production process as some LPD contributors assume. The monitoring of work attendance, the expenditure of labour-power, and movement within the workplace, are just aspects of this regulation. The control of labour process activities is the framework in which the worker justifies his/her existence at the point of production to

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<sup>3</sup> See the general critique of the LPD, in Chapter 2, for my analysis of the category of Real Subsumption of Labour (RSL).

capital. Edwards (1979) outlines three forms of control -simple, technical and bureaucratic control- in historical and labour-market terms. As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the refinery workers are confronted with a combination of all the three forms of control. Clocking-in and out is itself the first stage of 'technical' or 'direct' control (Friedman 1977, 1979). In addition, all production workers, from Plant Operator to the Chief Operator not only direct the production but are as well subject to 'technical monitoring' by the instruments which confront them as fixed capital. In each work area, performance is also monitored by supervisory personnel, and as if to query the latter, the top management personnel also pay intermittent surprise visits to the plant. Still further down the line is the 'bureaucratic control'; from the regulation of movement in and out of the plant, the regulation of the work performance, to a re-doubling of checks on attendance in the Process Plants, etc. (Ch.5).

Again the contradictory nature of these forms of work control has to be recognized. While you can attempt to control attendance by installing clocking machines, this does not guarantee that someone is not clocking-in for another. So you have Security Guards posted around the machines to guarantee no one 'cheats' the machine. But here again you have to double up on the Guards themselves by having their supervisors check on them as well; who knows, the Game-Keeper may be aiding the Poachers. On the other hand, the fact that the plant is working without any hitch does not mean that adequate control of labour is being achieved, so again supervisory personnel have to reinforce the surveillance, and so on. That senior management persons make unscheduled visits to the process plant, says much for their own recognition of the indeterminacy of supervisory control. On the other hand, the 'bureaucratic' regulation of work through multiple filling of Work Permits between Process and Maintenance unit operatives, is not without its contradictory aspects. As I pointed out in Chapter 5, the enforcement of the procedure has led to a situation where no maintenance worker will take the initiative in doing a repair job before all the copies of the Work Permit are signed by the designated persons. If the purpose of the regulation was the regulation of labour for enhanced commodity production, its enforcement potentially hampers that process. In other words, what Palloix (1976) called 'porosity' in the labour process, and the contradictory nature of the



means of regulating work performance, remain significant problem areas for those who perform the 'global functions of capital'. The perfect control apparatus has not been invented. This is mainly because, unlike any other commodity entering the production process, labour-power has the unique character of being bound-up in its bearer: the workers, who are living, thinking and active human beings.

The implications of this aspect of labour-power are the mediation of the primary commodity relations on two inter-related ways. First, is what Marx calls the duality of labour-power and the labour process. Work is not just a way of earning one's livelihood, it is also -to a greater or lesser degree- a process of self-expression. Workers' creative expression of life may coincide with their location in the production process, workers can, and often do get enthusiastically involved in the performance of work. For some it is the challenge of cracking a problem, for still some others, the work is the validation of their educational training. Even among operators with limited formal education, active engagement with their work can produce a striking relationship with 'their' machines, e.g. referring to mechanical objects in almost animate and personal terms. In the case of the latter group for instance, there are constant references to the fact that they have skill which even the university trained engineers -who are their superordinates- cannot match. For instance, picking early signs of impending technical problems from minor changes in the sound level or the vibration of the instruments or the colour of the smoke coming from the furnace smoke stack.<sup>4</sup>

All these reflect the concrete labour element of the duality of the labour process, which mediates the primary commodity relations of production, to the extent that it reflects aspects of workers' expression of life. Even in the most depressing situations, the workers themselves make the distinction between their work and the relations of subordination to which they are subjected. Furthermore, the active engagement of many workers in production is facilitated by the character of the employing unit of capital as

<sup>4</sup> Manwaring & Wood (1985) call it 'tacit skill' and is a significant aspect of workers' active engagement in work. To suggest therefore that 'a conflict of interest cannot necessarily be presumed' (p.181), is to collapse issues of different levels of analysis, which is unfortunate in light of Wood's other works. They also did not deal with the contradictory nature of work, which the poem they used as caption ('A Need') eloquently portrays; 'And I am lost in the contradiction/ Of loving and yet loathing/ This need for creation'.

State-Capital. Work, as I earlier mentioned, is seen as their contribution to national development, which is also the emphasis in NNPC's projected corporate image. This engagement is further enhanced by the cultivation of corporate citizenship through sporting activities, newsletters, etc. The ideology of work projected at the State and corporate levels however, taps into the non-capitalist, peasant, work ethos. In other words the mediation of commodity relations, to the extent that it facilitates work performance, is a multi-layered process which may be nationally specific in the forms it takes. This mediation of commodity relations is by no means an illusory concealment of the extraction of surplus value, in the sense that it captures for instance, the concrete labour aspect of production activities. Neither can the 'labour process' be seen as autonomously (relative or otherwise) producing the active engagement in production.

To an extent, Burawoy's (1979) category of consent generated by the labour process itself is a valid claim. However, as I noted in Chapter 2, his conclusion derives from a pessimistic adoption of game theory analysis, not the duality of the labour process. More important is that an interpretation of workers' active engagement in production as some sort of pathological subordination fails to appreciate the contradictory dimension of work. Understanding the duality of the labour-power itself (as use-value and as exchange-value) and the labour process (as concrete labour and abstract labour: the substance of value) means that we have to recognize the contradictory unity in the performance of work. The very instance in which workers develop intimate relations with the means of production, also becomes the basis for challenging managerial or supervisory powers. In the same instance, projecting the corporation as a national asset belonging to all of us facilitates workers' demands to be treated as human beings, not just objects of production; better working conditions, better remuneration, etc. A Manager who fancies himself as in traditional chieftain relations with the workers, also risks having people challenge his power when he becomes too domineering, as would happen in a village community. These are concrete expressions of the contradictory aspects of workers location in production expressed in specific cultural terms.

Furthermore, seeing 'adaptation to work' as simply a case of self-mortification, fails to appreciate how the work environment is also being adapted to the workers -the



Plant Operator who turns the night-shift into his swatting session, for another A-Level paper, etc. As starry-eyed as it may sound, the terrain of production is also a terrain of cultural activities of people attempting to rescue and re-assert their humanity, this in spite of the context where they are defined as disposable objects of production. The LC/W, as the framework of these cultural activities also serves as the repository of collective protection against the supervision and collective struggles -union or non-union based- in the same sense that Cabral (1980a) talks of national culture as a repository of national liberation struggles.

The mediation of production relations that I discussed as the VC/W, can be interpreted as facilitating effort intensification, but that is to assert only an aspect of its complex expression. The emphatic relations that develop between supervisors and the workers reflect a combination of collective experience of the concrete labour and the collective struggles under the ENI Management. A vital element of the former is the contradictory location of the supervisory personnel within the production process itself; performing at once the global functions of capital (control and coordination of production) and the global functions of the collective worker. An equally significant dimension of this empathic relation, is the extent to which sustained relations between people as human beings and not just cogs in the wheel of production, mediates the primary relation of domination and control.

However, the LC/W and VC/W are not simply the products of the 'labour process'. To make sense of the forms that the reassertion of collective humanity takes on the shopfloor, one has to situate it within the context of peripheral capitalist formation as a conjuncture of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production and reproduction of social life. The setting up of a self-help saving and thrift cooperative among process workers, the collection of money-gifts for co-workers with new-born babies or those who are bereaved, etc., reflect specific cultural practices within which workers redefine their relations within the context of production. This is also not limited to shopfloor workers alone, since as we saw, it affects Foremen and Supervisors. The same non-capitalist cultural sources also affect the exercise of supervisory power. In circumventing the normal procedure for granting 'compassionate leave', so that P.I. could visit his ill father in his

home-town, his Supervisor was redefining the principal relation of production from the perspective of the cultural significance of P.I.'s fulfillment of his filial obligation. This situation is, I am sure, not peculiar to Nigeria or the refinery. The very provision for 'compassionate leave' in the conditions of service is evident of the recognition of the mediation of commodity relations. All these involve people reasserting their humanity within the context of commodity relations, rather than simply facilitating the extraction of surplus value. This often involves explicitly an anti-capitalist ethos and is sometimes subversive of the ethos of individualism.

The important aspects of the 'Alternative Morality' are its multiple sources which give it its distinct form. While the 'morality' finds expression in the terrain of production it does not simply reflect the specific point of production. The 'Alternative Morality' has its bases in the collectivist morality of pre-colonial, indigenous relations, in religious morality, etc., and the extent to which it derives from reality and struggles of the contemporary Nigerian formation. The 'urban poor' neighbourhoods which nurture the feeling of (collective) domination go beyond the working class, in fostering the self-description as 'poor people' rather than simply 'working class'.

The idea of a labour process which in a relatively autonomous way produces its own ideological 'apparatus' (Burawoy 1979, 1985; Edwards 1983, 1986), fails to grasp the multi-layered nature of social life and therefore people's perception of their worlds. This concept of the labour process, also results from a tendency (i) to define the 'labour process' or the 'sphere of production' only in terms of the specific workplace being researched, and (ii) to treat the notion of 'economy' as the technical framework of production (Colletti 1971, Clarke 1977). So for Burawoy for instance, the 'economic' becomes one of the three moments of work. Social relations outside the workplace are therefore neglected or treated as the sociological notion of 'society', before we know it, we are back within the Parsonian schema. As Lovell (1980:248) warns, there is the problem in bourgeois sociology, of treating the 'phenomenal forms of capitalism as though they were what they appear to be -independent and autonomous practices each with their own "condition for existence... and each with its own specificity"'. Clarke (1977) also criticize those who use Gramsci's concept of 'civil society' in this way. 'Civil society' all too often



becomes the theoretical trash can into which everything which is not 'economic' or 'political' is dumped.<sup>5</sup>

To return to the issue at hand, in the same way that the relations of production -in NNPC or the Refinery- reflect the mediation of capitalist relations by non-capitalist relations, the forms that workers' consciousness take, reflect the conjuncture of the capitalist and non-capitalist ethos. But these relations are not just epiphenomenal reflections, they mediate and give rise to distinct relations and struggles. What we call 'alternative morality' has to be seen therefore as the specific forms that the consciousness of a specific working class takes. The 'morality' is not just critical of the capitalist labour process but of the distributional relations and the ethos of individualism. To a significant extent, their concepts of 'fairness', 'right and wrong' not only reject capitalist production relations but are subversive of bourgeois morality. There is, however, a lot of ambiguity and incoherence in the workers' ideas. These ideas reflect the variety and ambiguity of lived experiences, the ideological propaganda of the various fractions of the dominant bloc and the functionaries of capital, and the workers' contest of these ideas etc. This, however, is not peculiar as other studies have shown (cf Nichols & Armstrong 1976, Nichols & Beynon 1976). In any case, as Gray (1986:367) notes;

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<sup>5</sup> While it is important to stress 'that forms are forms of the social relations of production, not the epiphenomena of some narrowly defined economic practices' (Lovell 1980:249) in order to avoid the problem of reductionism, I do have my worries. It is difficult to treat the forces that underwrite the workers' 'alternative morality' as simply forms of capitalist relations of production. The very character of the peripheral capitalist formation is the conjuncture of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production and reproduction of social life. While production activities and relations in the non-capitalist 'domains' are subsumed under the capitalist mode, they also impose limitations on the capitalist mode and often become the basis of opposition to capitalist expansion -the mode of land ownership is an example. In the same way while some of the non-capitalist forms of reproduction of social life have become subsumed under the capitalist relations or utilized for struggles within the dominant bloc, etc., the same relations or others have become pockets of resistance against the bourgeois ethos. For one thing a collectivist ethos of some non-capitalist modes imposes limitations on unfettered bourgeois individualism. The complex mediation and interaction mean that the emergent character of the peripheral capitalist formation is defined by this conjuncture; local and international. While we can deal with the specific forms of relations with the method of abstraction, I still believe that the theorization of the 'civil society' is of vital importance in making sense of the different terrains of social relations -family, clan, religious, linguistic, urban neighbourhoods, etc.- which simultaneously avoids the problem of reductionism and the slippage into parsonian sociological schema. I must admit that I am, at the moment, unable to -adequately- handle the task.

If language is "part of social being", then it must be seen like other parts of social being, as multi-layered, complex, fractured, composed of incoherence and silence, as well as the smooth flow of would-be authoritative public discourse'

The workers cannot, however be seen as a peasantry which finds itself in wage employment, nor can their ideas be reduced to a replay of the 19th century European working class. The 'alternative morality' is not just symptomatic nostalgia for a lost (pre-colonial) collectivist society. It reflects, as I noted above, the distinct character of the working class within a specific formation, and its integration with other fractions of the dominated bloc in society. But it is also a working class segmented along linguistic, national and religious lines. While the terrain of production involves the reconstitution of relations in ways that diminish the lines of segmentation, the latter's implications for wider political struggles cannot be under-estimated.

However with all these limitations, it is also difficult to argue that this 'working class can only develop interests in the reproduction of capitalism... not develop radical needs that point beyond capitalism' (Burawoy 1985:259).<sup>6</sup> What is called 'alternative morality' here takes the form of call for 'justice' and sometimes 'socialism' at the national political level. The workers' conception of their location in the relations of production, in all its incoherence and clumsiness, 'constructs constituencies rather than simply register their pre-given existence' (Gray 1986: 367, cf Stedman Jones 1983). It is to this aspect of the social relations of production that I now turn.

### 11.3. State-Capital, Work and the Politics of Production.

Before proceeding to correct a false demarcation made in this work, and resolve the conceptual issues that prompted this study, it is important to return to the issue of the politics of production. As I pointed out in Chapters 1 and 2, the development of this concept is a useful device which enables us to problematize relations at work and deal with the varied forms of workers' struggles -protest or oppositional, covert or overt, individual or collective- as rooted in the social relations of production. In addition to the comments I made in Chapter 2, about the problems in Burawoy's typology of 'factory

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<sup>6</sup> Burawoy is paraphrasing the 'structuralist' argument here.



regimes' and the problems in the distinction of relations in from of production, it is important to free the concept of production politics of some other aspects of his analysis.

First is his demarcation of the 'three moments of work' (1985:35) such that the labour process is seen as the economic moment (p.253) and the political moment is crystallized in the political apparatus or what he also calls the factory regimes. The problem with this schema is that even if there are no 'struggles', the labour process (as the terrain of transforming labour-power into a value-creating substance) is immediately political (Marx 1976:549-50). Perhaps as a momentary distinction in a process of one-sided abstraction, this might not be such a serious limitation. However, given that the factory regime is 'shaped and protected' by the state (1985:254), the factory regime easily becomes a substitute for Internal State (1979). In other words, the terrain of union/management relations, wage bargaining, etc., which does not give too much room for politics of production outside that domain. This is quite unfortunate since Burawoy is aware of the unity of the different moments as 'inextricably interwoven' (1985:254); and also holds out the vision of production politics being beyond the orthodox industrial relations schema.

The second problem is the way Burawoy demarcates 'global' or state politics and production politics. Although this is a necessary, conceptual, distinction, there are nonetheless some problems. The unilinear format in which the State structures and guarantees all other apparatuses in society -family, production, community, etc (1985:254)- is a regurgitation of the Althusserian structuralist schema. The implications are; first, we have no idea what guarantees the state -unless of course you turn the other 'apparatuses' into 'ideological state' institutions. Second, Burawoy's schema does not analytically recognize other terrains of social relation. For instance, we cannot understand, in the Nigerian case, other domains of social relation which shape or mediate production relations, except those shaped by the state. Yet, an essential aspect of my call for the theorization of 'civil society', is specifically because of the terrains of social relations which cannot be seen as the extension of capitalism, much less of the (peripheral) capitalist state.

Third, a rigid demarcation of the global and production politics -beyond one-sided abstraction- fails to understand that even when production politics are strictly about 'bread and butter' issues, they do impinge on 'global' politics. The problem as Sheila Cohen (1987) notes about Thompson's (1983, 1986) demarcation of struggles of resistance ('bread and butter' unionism) from the struggles of transformation (class struggle!) is that both are about the same thing; the 'capitalist relations of production' (p.49). One 'politics' does not just spillover into the other (Burawoy 1984); they are intertwined. It is therefore important to reiterate the distinction that needs to be kept in mind between the categories of abstraction and the concrete processes they are trying to appropriate in thought. The distinction between 'global' and 'production' politics, as categories of abstraction, captures fine distinctions in thought which are not that explicit in the concrete.

In the light of these amendments, I also need to correct a false demarcation made in this study, up till now. I titled Part II of this work 'the dynamics of the labour process' and Part III, 'the politics of production'. The latter deal exclusively with the terrain of unionism and union/management relations, in spite of the discussion of 'worker resistance' in Part II. This may suggest that the 'resistance' is not production politics. While the demarcation and exposition of shopfloor relations and non-union based actions from union-based collective activities, were necessary for the purpose of my argument with Industrial Relations orthodoxy and as a one-sided abstraction, it no longer suffices. At this phase of synthesis, it needs correcting.

As we have seen so far, the work ('employment') relations we are dealing with involve not just some nondescript collection of human beings for some nature-imposed activities, but a distinct, historically specific relation. These relations are about commodity production, the transformation of labour power into value and surplus-value production. The specific conjuncture of the relation involves its mediation by other non-capitalist relations. So far, I have suspended a dimension of it which involves struggles over the directing and control of the labour activity and the relations of distribution. Or simply put, the relations of production since the relation of distribution derives from the



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capitalist relations of production.<sup>7</sup> Hence I use 'politics of production' here, to embrace struggles over these two aspects of the relations of production: labour activity and distributional relations.

As evident from the discussions in Chapters 6 and 8, production politics are by no means limited to the institutions of mediation. The worker who takes a carving knife to his superordinate is no less involved in production politics than the Process Plant workers who organized a collective rejection of sub-standard safety boots. Both are no less expressions of production politics than the 1983 strike action. However, it is important, for the purpose of my argument with orthodox Industrial Relations, to re-emphasize not just the location of the workers' union activities in the shopfloor communities and consciousness. The shopfloor communities (LC/W, VC/W) are not only the bases of union participation but of the mobilization and sustenance of collective action as evident in the 1983 strike. The areas with very strong expressions of LC/W, for instance, were areas which stuck out longest after the national leadership of the union had called off the strike. The ease of mobilization for the strike also demonstrates the strength of the LC/W as a basis for shopfloor organization.

The implications of shopfloor collectivities for union-based activities are also evident in the extent to which collective demands and the lay union representatives' articulation of those demands reflect the 'alternative morality' of shopfloor workers. It is the 'morality' which underpins the demands that led to the 1983 strike and the arguments at union/management meetings. As I have pointed out earlier, the framework of this shopfloor morality is by no means a relatively autonomous product of the shopfloor. Its expression on the shopfloor, reflects an awareness of class or social bloc linkages which bind them to workers in other sectors of the economy and other fractions of the 'poor people'. Again, it is a 'morality' which is expressed at the union level when leaders of the Refinery and the Falomo units, at different times, agitated on behalf of the secondary workers in spite of the fact that these were not members of their union.

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<sup>7</sup> This contrasts sharply with the starting point of orthodox Industrial Relations in the Trinity Formula as I will discuss in a moment.



None of these arguments is necessarily subversive of orthodox industrial relations, after all the existence of 'work groups', for instance is recognized; however they raise a number of issues. Once we recognize the workplace communities as domains of cultural activities and repositories of collective action, then collective bargaining oriented union-based collectivities cannot be projected as the necessary form or the only recognizable ones. To the extent that collective activities can and do exist outside of unionized collectivities, the struggles organized around the latter are only a form of production politics - albeit a very important one-, not the only form. The problem with most liberal-pluralist policy recommendations is that they either assume that union is the only valid collectivity or the only legitimate one. This is both evident in post-Donovan Britain and Nigeria since 1968. As a reflection on the discussions of workers' consciousness, on the other hand, understanding work collectivities as repositories of cultural action also allows us to go beyond the 'Big Bang' view of workers consciousness, which links it to upsurges in strike activities (see Cohen 1980).

Furthermore, if we understand the specificity of the Capital-Labour (-Power) relations and appreciate the production of surplus value (or labour) as the premise of the relations of production, we have to raise more than minor queries about the trinity formula-premise of Industrial Relations orthodoxy. It is only when we start from the Trinity Formula/Weberian perspective of production relations that we can reach the farcical conclusion that wage bargaining can restore the imbalance in production relations. The Procedural Rules in NNPC for instance, systematically remove all issues of the direction and control of the labour process from the negotiable or consultative agenda. However, these issues are not outside the purview of shopfloor production politics. When we take these observations in conjunction with the shopfloor actions, one begins to raise queries as to why collective bargaining or the institution of mediation should become prioritized. Not only do they exclude a significant dimension of production relations but of production politics as well. If industrial relations is about 'employment' (or more precisely production) relations, surely the view that collective bargaining or other institutions of mediation are its necessarily form, is not only inappropriate but intellectually suspect.

Two comments follow from this; one is empirical, the other is on method of theoretical analysis. First, the Mauritian workers who set fire to a sugar-cane field (Cohen 1980:8), the Southern African miners who peg notices of mines to avoid on trees (van Onselen 1976:234) or the Kano women who rely on the village organization in their struggles with BUD<sup>8</sup> (Jackson 1978) are no less involved in production politics than the Warri Refinery workers in 1983 or the British Miners in 1984/5. The notion that 'industrial relations' cease to exist without the institutions of mediation is therefore invalid. Second, the class-ideological (and ethnocentric) premise of the liberal-pluralism has been eloquently traced in texts that are, by now, standard reading and teaching materials, therefore does not warrant a re-examination here. Perhaps what needs pointing out are the implications of the method of abstraction for Industrial Relations orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup> Added to the technicist view of production is the limited appreciation of the issues of different levels of abstraction. The forms that the regulation of the relations of production takes cannot belong to the same level of analysis as the relations being regulated. The more concrete expression of relations of production must be understood as a result of the complex mediation of the latter, which are historically, culturally specific and are outcomes of struggles (and 'compromises') waged within those contexts. The tendency to equate a specific Anglo-American experience with the necessary form of production politics, may reflect an imperialist aspect of orthodox 'intellectual' endeavours but it also has this less sinister element of the method of theory to it.

However, because the institutions of mediation, in the forms of collective bargaining, dispute arbitration etc., are forms of managing production relations, they merit very close attention and analysis. Not the least because of the prominence given to the sphere of mediation within academia and the state, but also because these institutions attempt, as it were, to 'routinize' class relations and struggles. The extent to which the routinization process fails or succeeds is a different issue. We can deal with this necessary reflection on the sphere of mediation in two ways. First, to focus on the processes of

<sup>8</sup> A Belgian vegetable company operating in Kano, Nigeria.

<sup>9</sup> My appreciation to Peter Nolan who first drew my attention to this implication of the method of abstraction for orthodox Industrial Relations writings.



mediation as the mediation of production relations, and secondly, on the 'peculiarities of the sphere of mediation'.

The developments that led to the restructuring of unions and the national grievance machinery, in Nigeria, reflect the apprehension about the growing workers' militancy which threatened the peripheral capitalist State: or so thought the state functionaries. Most of the actions were autonomous shopfloor militancy (Lubeck 1978, 1986, Peace 1979, Waterman 1978). The restructuring also reflected the increased emphasis of enhanced capitalist expansion and the requirement of controlling workers' agitational spirit (Waterman 1983). In other words, the State's re-structuring of the 'apparatuses' of production, was in response to struggles around production relations and attempts to mediate these relations. The State, as functioning capital (note the preponderance of state-capital and the public sector employment) was also being directly challenged. Production politics did not just spill over into economic or global politics, they were all bound up.

As a digression, it is equally important to stress that what emerged in terms of Union structures and control over them, in 1977, and the 'political apparatuses' of production in places like the NNPC were not simply outcomes of the structuration by the State, but of intense -perhaps defensive- opposition and struggles by Trade Unionists.

At the level of individual firms, the processes around the sphere of mediation ought to be grasped first of all as the mediation of production relations. While the ideology of 'negotiated settlement' may appeal to liberal-pluralists, it is only the other side of having strikers shot or incarcerated, underlining the hostility that challenges to the powers of capital can unleash. I have outlined the hostile and concerted campaign waged by the Employers' bodies, both at the level of the oil industry and NECA against NUPENG leadership. In NNPC for instance, the initial hostility to union recognition did not simply evaporate with the setting up of the internal institutions of mediation. To the extent that the union members remain compliant, the Management would obviously have no objection. The workers and their lay leaders as we found out, were mostly anything but compliant and between 1981 and 1983, the hostility of the top functionaries of capital increased with the level of the workers' demand for a 'fair deal'. The responses were at the corporate level a determination to 'enforce the procedural rules' -when it of course suited

the Management. As always in Kaduna Refinery, the response was to deport Union leaders to Lagos or have the Police arrest and detain them or smash up the strike action. In Warri Refinery, a strategic plan was put to full use during the 1983 strike action of NUPENG members. The strategic 'requirement' of commodity production remained dominant.<sup>10</sup> In the light of this, I sounded a caution in Chapter 9 about the tendency to respond to intra-union opposition as ipso facto a good thing for Union democracy. In NUPENG's case, the opposition groups have often ended up being run by management.

The sphere of mediation however throws up processes which are peculiar to it. I have noted in Chapter 10, the extent to which the sustained relations between union leaders and individual management representatives, generate equivalents of 'Stockholm syndrome' which have indeterminate consequences. On the one hand it can be used against the union members, but on the other hand it can become the point of porosity in the managerial armour which a union leader can utilize. The contradictory location of lower and middle management personnel as well as intra-management division, also creates points of porosity which articulate union leaders have utilized. Some aspects of this form what I referred to as the Hidden Agenda. The very terrain of mediation however tends to rip the shopfloor representatives from their members and insert them into an environment more natural for Management representatives. As I pointed out, it requires an element of 'cocky disdain' of management for a shopfloor activist to emerge from that environment without compromising his members. The institution of mediation also tends to promote a militaristic or aristocratic concept of leadership, and the illusion -among some union leaders- of being co-authors of the destiny of others, alongside the top brass of the establishment; the Minister, the MD, etc. These tendencies of the sphere of mediation, cannot however lead us to suppose that 'incorporation' is the order of the day. Some of these leaders are to a great extent, reflections of the shopfloor situation and many are among the most articulate and active of the membership. In any case, to be accused of a sell-out by the members almost automatically brings the union leaders' ambition to an end, a fact not lost on the various leaders themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> A food for thought perhaps in the light of Rose & Jones (1985) objection about managerial 'strategy'. If I did not come across the document I doubt if any Manager in Warri would have admitted to its existence.



It is also important to emphasize the re-adaptation of the processes of mediation within the peculiar cultural and general social context of Nigeria, which give interest mediation in NNPC a distinct colour. I have cited cases of an MD in the corporation who defined union/management relations almost like a lineage, with him as the head. This is no doubt a form of the 'unitarist' perspective which also informs the articulation of Corporate Community in Work, but a corollary of the lineage (or even chieftain) articulation of a unitarist ideology is the extent to which deference in terms of respect for those who are one's elders (and in high positions) underwrites union/management relations. In a case, which I pointed out, a Head of an IRD demanded to be respected as an older person. However, the manipulation of educational 'cultural capital', willfully deceiving the less-educated union activists reflects the manipulation, predominantly by the educated petty-bourgeoisie in Nigeria, generally.

There is however a lot of indeterminacy in the production politics, both in terms of the results of the sphere of mediation for the workers and the 'porosity' of State actions on the processes of mediation, which require explicit attention. The irony is that this is the dimension which liberal-pluralists have strongly emphasized. First, the intention of the military regime in 1977 in passing the Petroleum Anti-Sabotage decree -with its death penalty for strike actions- was clearly to arrest the spate of strike action in the industry. This has clearly not succeeded for three reasons; (i) it dealt only with the symptom not the cause of workers' discontent, (ii) it will take more guts than any military regime in Nigeria has shown to line-up strikers against the wall and shoot them; and, which is the issue about 'porosity' of state action, (iii) workers have simply found ways of striking without 'violating' the law. Perhaps an eloquent indication that 'porosity' is not the exclusive privilege of the labour process, is the 1980 Income Policy Guideline which was meant to restrain wage demands but became the basis for wage agitation within the NNPC. Second, while the intention of the 1976-78 State actions was to stem the tide of shopfloor militancy in NUPENG for instance, the result of legalized industrial unionism was to strengthen shopfloor control over both Branch and national union organizations. Furthermore, and at the level of workers' organization, the Union collective provides a bridge over the segmentary nature of shopfloor collectivities, by linking the members

across departments, companies and the country. It may not be a class-wide organization but it goes beyond the micro-segmentation of LC/W and the union remains the closest thing to a class organization which the workers have at their disposal. The crises in the union and the problem of leadership 'betrayal', have not just produced pessimism among the workers but also attempts to seize the union and make it work for themselves. The sphere of mediation for all its limitation, provides a foothold in organized collective struggles, nation-wide. What passes for the pessimism of the intelligence, to paraphrase Gramsci, can turn out to be the optimism of the will.

### The Postface.

To return to the issue of the method of abstraction in the understanding of the relations and politics of production, it is essential first of all, to establish the historical specificity of the fundamental premise of the relations we are interested in. From grasping the most simple and abstract dimension of the relations, we can begin to make sense of the lower, more complex, levels of the relations, until we make sense of the most complex and most concrete expressions of the relations. This involves multiple layers of mediation by forces and relations which are culturally and historically specific. We have to appreciate that the peculiar forms that relations take -relations (and politics) of production- are the specific outcomes of relations between definite human beings. What is more, that while people

make their own history... they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'. (Marx 1934: 11)

In the same way, we have to understand that the forms that production politics take are the outcomes of historically specific struggles (and compromises), within definite socio-cultural contexts. Approaching the issues of the social relations of production from the perspective of the method of abstraction, allows us I believe, to specify the immanent and the contingent. I hope that the discussion in this and the previous chapters reflects these complexly mediated relations, without losing sight of the 'simple and most abstract' aspects of the social relations of production. I also hope that this study helps us



to overcome the intellectual barrier which takes a specific mode of production politics as its necessary form.

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## APPENDIX A (i)

WORK AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS IN NIGERIA'S  
PETROLEUM INDUSTRY

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would greatly appreciate it if you could spare a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. It is part of an ongoing study of work in the Petroleum industry. We hope that through this you can express your heart-felt feelings on a wide range of issues that affect you as an employee/worker.

We will like to assure you that this is an independent study, not in anyway connected with either the Management or the Union, and that only the researcher will see the completed questionnaire. We will like to guarantee you maximum confidentiality. Please ensure that your questionnaire is returned. Thank you in advance for your time, effort and understanding.

Jimi O. Adesina

PART A. Please mark X in the correct space, for questions that require that type of answer.

1. In what section of the Refinery do you work? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your job title? \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g Operator, Clerk, Engineer)
3. When did you start to work in the Refinery? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify year)
4. Were you transferred from other division of NNPC? YES ☐ NO ☐
5. If YES, for how long did you work there? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify years)
6. Your sex? MALE ☒ FEMALE ☐
7. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)
8. What is your marital status? SINGLE ☐ MARRIED ☒ DIVORCED ☐  
WIDOWED ☐ SEPARATED ☐
9. If married, how many wives do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ (for male respondents)
10. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your highest level of education? NO FORMAL EDUCATION ☐  
PRIMARY ☐ TECHNICAL/MODERN SCHOOL ☐ SECONDARY SCHOOL ☐  
H.S.C. ☐ O.N.D ☐ H.N.D ☐ B.Sc/B.A ☒ MASTERS ☐ PH.D ☐  
Please specify any other one not listed above \_\_\_\_\_
12. Nationality? \_\_\_\_\_
13. If Nigerian, what is your state of origin? \_\_\_\_\_
14. If from Bendel State, what is your local government area? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Before joining the NNPC, have you ever been in paid employment?  
YES ☒ NO ☐
16. Before joining NNPC what were you doing? IN SCHOOL ☐ SELF EMPLOYED ☐  
DOING APPRENTICESHIP ☐ UNEMPLOYED (for over 6 months) ☐  
WORKING FOR ANOTHER COMPANY/MINISTRY ☐ WORKING FOR SOMEONE ☐
17. How many dependants (adults, children and relatives) do you support financially? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How many other salary/money earners do you have in your immediate household? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Which union/association do you belong to? NUPENG ☐ PENGASSAN ☒  
I'VE CONTRACTED OUT ☐ WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO BELONG TO  
UNION ☐
20. Have you had any operation? \_\_\_\_\_



**PART B:** In the following sets of questions or statements, please mark X in the box, opposite each statement or question, which best sum up your own opinion or response to the statement or question. Thank you.

Question 19. How much of the following are present in your job/work?.

	None	Little	Very Little	A Moderate Amount	Much	Very Much	Maximum Amount
1. The opportunity for independent thought and action or personal initiative/judgement							
2. How much chance or freedom do you have to choose your own method of working?.							
3. How much challenge does your work offer you?							
4. How much recognition do you get, from your immediate boss for doing a good work?.							

Question 20. How frequently or often do the following occur in your job?.

	It Never Happened	It Rarely Happens	It Sometimes Happens	Often	Very Often	Happens Nearly Always
1. How often your work interferes with your family or private life.						
2. How often your work load being too heavy						
3. How often you feel tired doing the same sort of work day in and day out.						
4. The nature of your work makes you too tired to enjoy family or your private life.						
5. How often you receive an assignment without adequate or necessary materials/resources to do it.						

Question 21. How far do you agree with each of the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	I Agree	I Agree Slightly	I Disagree Slightly	I Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. That the working hours make it difficult for you to look after your children or private life.						
2. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work						
3. I used to find my work more interesting than now.						
4. A well paying job without much chance for promotion is not the type I like						
5. People should be satisfied with the work they have instead of asking for promotion						

22.	I Strongly Agree	I Agree	I Agree Slightly	I don't know	I Disagree Slightly	I Disagree	I Strongly Disagree
1. Decisions are usually taken in this organisation without consultation with those who have to live with it.							
2. Management here treat the union fairly.							
3. This organisation has a poor way of handling employee complaints.							
4. Most people in this organisation are satisfied with the overall nature of things in the Corporation.							
5. Management does not pay enough attention to safety aspects of work in this place.							
6. Most supervisors/immediate bosses are more interested in getting the work done than how this affects those who depend on them.							
7. My job involves a lot of hazard (physical or chemical).							
8. I think my immediate boss is a very nice person.							
9. I think my supervisor or equivalent person is a very nice person.							
10. Most accidents are as a result of workers being careless.							
11. Most supervisors/immediate bosses don't like suggestions about how to do a job from those under them.							
12. My immediate boss will defend those under him, even to Management when he thinks they are right.							
13. The general conditions of service here is unfair to junior staff.							
14. Most problems here are caused by Management's bad policies.							
15. Management is often not prepared to take action on workers' grievances unless backed up with action or threat of action.							
16. The management is doing an efficient job here.							

Q.23. Do you think workers have interest that are different from that of



-4-

25. Do you believe there is a danger of your being victimized if you are outspoken in your opinion against the following?

	Definitely Yes	Possibly Yes	I am Not Sure	Possibly No	Definitely No
the Management					
Your immediate boss					
Your Supervisor or the equivalent					
the Union officials					
Your co-workers/co- employees					

26. Which of the following best describes your participation in the Union (NUPENG or PENGASSAN), if you are a member?

- ☐ I am a member because I have to be, I wouldn't be in a Union otherwise.
- ☐ I believe it is important to be in the Union but I tend not to get involved in Union activities.
- ☐ I become actively involved over certain issues.
- ☐ I am an active member of the Union most of the time.

27. Have you ever held any Union post? YES ☐ NO ☒

28. If YES, which of this? PREVIOUSLY ☐ CURRENTLY ☐

29. How far do you agree with each of the following statements.

N.B 'Union' refers to NUPENG or PENGASSAN; whichever you belong to.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Don't Know	Slightly Disagree	I Dis- agree	Strongly Disagree
1. All workers should be- long to trade union.							
2. I can expect help from my Union if I have a pro- -blem here.							
3. Union officials are not interested in workers' pro- -blems.							
4. Union is the only means by which workers can resist Management's bad poli- cy.							
5. Our local/chapter union officials are doing a fine job for us.							
6. Our National officers are doing a fine job.							
7. Management is prepared to gain an advantage over the Union by deceiving the off- cials and Union members							
8. Collective actions (e.g strikes) do more harm than good to workers.							
9. Members get enough bene- fits for the money paid to Union as check-off dues							
10. The morale among work- ers/employees here is very high.							
11. A trade union should con- fine itself to conditions of service and not questions of workers' life after office							

30. For the work you do, the volume of work, hours of work etc how would you rate your financials remuneration i.e your total pay
- ☐ I am very much underpaid and I don't think it is fair
  - ☐ I am very much underpaid but I don't mind it
  - ☐ My pay matches/is alright for the work I do
  - ☐ My pay is far above the type/volume of work I do.

31. Does your work involve any hazard? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐
- 32 If YES what type (e.g chemical) \_\_\_\_\_

33. How often do you face this type of hazard(s) in your work?

Everytime	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely

34. Looking at the general pattern of promotion exercise here, do you think the procedure is fair to everybody? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

35. Please list the following in order of preference, i.e the one you would love to have most as 1, the next as 2 etc
- i) \_\_\_\_\_ a good salary
  - ii) \_\_\_\_\_ job security
  - iii) \_\_\_\_\_ Appreciation from my bosses for a good work done by me
  - iv) \_\_\_\_\_ A chance to use my own mind and initiatives
  - v) \_\_\_\_\_ Being able to retire early with a good pension and gratuity
  - vi) \_\_\_\_\_ A clean, quiet and comfortable place of work
  - vii) \_\_\_\_\_ Reasonable working hours
  - viii) \_\_\_\_\_ Greater promotion prospect.

36. What do you like most about your job? \_\_\_\_\_
- What do you dislike most about your job? \_\_\_\_\_

N.B. If more than one or two, go on and write them in any available space.

37. If we had to conduct the questionnaire survey again in what areas would you as an individual want us to look into or ask questions about?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT OR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON ANY ISSUE(S) THAT WE HAVE RAISED IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, KINDLY WRITE THEM DOWN IN THIS PAGE AND THE NEXT. Thank you for the precious time you've given us in answering this questionnaire, we hope the result of this study will more than compensate your time and effort.



## APPENDIX A(ii).

WORK AND WORK SUPERVISION  
IN NIGERIA'S OIL  
INDUSTRY

Dear Sir/Madam,

This questionnaire survey is part of an on going study of work and workplace relations in the petroleum industry. It is an aspect of a doctoral programme being undertaken from Warwick University, UK. This bit of the survey is targeted at people, within the Refinery, whose official duties involve overseeing human resource utilization or supervision. Foremen, Supervisors, Chief Operators, upward.

We do appreciate that responding involves our cutting into your precious time. We would however greatly appreciate your positive response. This would help us understand and appreciate, at least, some other aspects of the 'world of work'. Every bit of information would be treated by this researcher as confidential. Thanks in advance for your time, effort and understanding.

Jimi O. Adesina.

PART A. Please mark X in the appropriate space, for questions requiring such responses.

1. In what unit/section of the Refinery do you work? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. What is the designation of your functional title, please? \_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g Foreman, Chief Operator etc)
  3. What is your career post designation please? \_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g Asst. Chief Engineer)
  4. What is your gender, please? MALE ☐ FEMALE ☐
  5. What is your age, please? \_\_\_\_\_ (kindly specify years)
  6. What is your marital status please? SINGLE ☐ MARRIED ☐ DIVORCED ☐  
WIDOWED ☐ SEPARATED ☐
  7. Kindly state your highest educational qualification (professional & academic)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  8. Nationality, \_\_\_\_\_
  9. If Nigerian, kindly state your State of origin. \_\_\_\_\_
  10. When did you start to work for NNPC, please? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify year)
  11. When did you start to work in the Refinery? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify year)
  12. Did you join the Refinery straight from the school? YES ☐ NO ☐
  13. If NO, where were you working please? CIVIL SERVICE ☐ PRIVATE COMPANY ☐  
NNPC ☐ AN OIL COMPANY ☐ POLICE/ARMED FORCES ☐ GOVERNMENT  
PARASTATAL ☐ OTHER DIVISION OF NNPC ☐
  14. Were you ever on an overseas training programme organised by NNPC?  
YES ☐ NO ☐
  15. Do you work shift now? YES ☐ NO ☐
  16. Have you ever worked shift, at any time before now? YES ☐ NO ☐
  17. Please if YES, for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_
  18. Even if you're not on permanent shift, does your work involve working irregular hours? YES ☐ NO ☐ NOT APPLICABLE ☐
  19. If YES, how often
- | All the time | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
|--------------|------------|-------|-----------|--------|
|              |            |       |           |        |
20. From your personal experience, in what ways do you think, working irregular hours or shift, affect your capacity to live a normal 'rythm' of life? Kindly explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21. Put into consideration the totality of your work, does the total remuneration you have adequately compensate your effort.

Yes, I Strongly Agree	Yes, I Agree	I am Not Sure	No, I Disagree	No, I Strongly Disagree

22. Do you belong to any union/association? NO ☐ PENGASSAN ☐ NUPENG ☐

23. Since joining the Refinery, how many times have you been promoted?.

24. Have you ever been on GLL4 or below (GLL5-GLL7), please? YES ☐ NO ☐

PART B.

1. Do the people working under you face any form of industrial hazard; chemical or physical? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

2. If YES, how often are they exposed to such hazard when working?

All the time	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Occasionally

3. In general how would you evaluate the level of industrial safety and hygiene here (i.e. exposure to chemical, noise pollution & adequate provision of safety wares)?

Fantastic	Very Good	Good	Okay	Poor	Very Poor	Terrible	I Don't know	No Comment

4. Do you think anything can be done to improve the situation? YES ☐ NO ☐

5. How often do you work directly with your 'subordinates', in the plant, field or on the beat?

All the time	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not Applicable

6. From your experience, do you think most workers are lazy?

YES, I Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	NO, I Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
YES, I Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	NO, I Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
YES, I Slightly Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	NO, I Disagree Slightly <input type="checkbox"/>
	I Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>

7. Have you ever had any situation where a Union official, in his/her capacity as a Unionist intervened or interceded, on behalf of someone under you, over matters arising from the work; e.g discipline etc?

YES ☐ NO ☐

8. If YES, how often in the following periods?

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Once or twice	Never
Past one year						
In the preceeding one year						

9. Do you think Unions' right to intervene on behalf of their members on issues of individual grievance, e.g disciplined is beneficial to the following:

- i) a smooth running of operations here? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐
- ii) workers' commitment to work YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐
- iii) your ability to 'keep things under control' YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

10. Do you believe most of the workers under your supervision are overworked most of the time?

Strongly Disagree	D/ Agree	Slightly D/ Agree	I don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

11. Do you think the remuneration system and package, here ensure a continuous



12. How frequently are you bothered, in your work, by the following?

	All the time	Very Frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
The feeling that you have too little authority to carry out your assigned responsibility.						
Not knowing just what the people you report to expect of you.						
That you'll not be able to satisfy conflicting demands made on you by various people, superiors and subordinates.						
That you don't have adequate material/human resources to effectively & promptly do the work assigned to you.						
Not being able to trust those under you to do a thorough job on their own.						
Problems with keeping those under you under tight control.						
That your honest but outspoken advice might be construed as insubordination.						
That extraneous factors; e.g. ethnicity, interference in operations, etc.						
The fact						

13. In your opinion, which of the underlisted, best suit what you might take as the most prudent and practical style of supervision

- ☐ A supervising officer should remain somewhat distant from his/her subordinates and use the 'iron fist' frequently or let people know it's there to be used.
- ☐ A supervising officer should remain somewhat distant, but use the 'kid glove' or the 'soft approach' most of the time.
- ☐ A supervising officer should get away from the aura of 'big man' and 'get down' with those under him, but keep the 'iron fist' close by..
- ☐ A supervising officer should get away from the aura of 'big man' 'get down' with his/her subordinates and use the kid glove most of the time.

14. How often have you been confronted with the following problems from those under you?

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Once or twice	Never
Physical attack						
Threat of physical attack						
Insubordination						
Threat to your person/family/property						

15. How often do you find yourself 'driving those under you hard' to get a job done quickly (even when you would have loved to make it easier for them)

Everytime Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

16. How often do you find yourself acting as spokesperson for the people

17. From your experience do you think it is wise for a supervising officer to allow people under him/her to speak without inhibition when they disagree with him about the nature of a problem or its solution?

Yes	Yes I	Yes I	I	No I	No I	No I
I Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	don't Know	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

18. How often do you think a person should be disciplined or rebuked for:

	All the time	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Once in a while	Never
Doing a poor job						
Not properly executing instruction						
Absence from duty						

19. Do you think the management, here, is 'giving in' too much, i.e. making too much concessions to the following:

i) the workers? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

ii) NUPENG? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

iii) PENGASSAN? YES ☐ NO ☐ I DON'T KNOW ☐

20. In your opinion, do you think giving time off to union officials, for union activities, is mostly indulging the individuals officials in idleness?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	I don't know	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

We would like to express our gratitude for your precious time generously given in your responding to this survey, we hope the outcome would more than compensate your time. Thanks.

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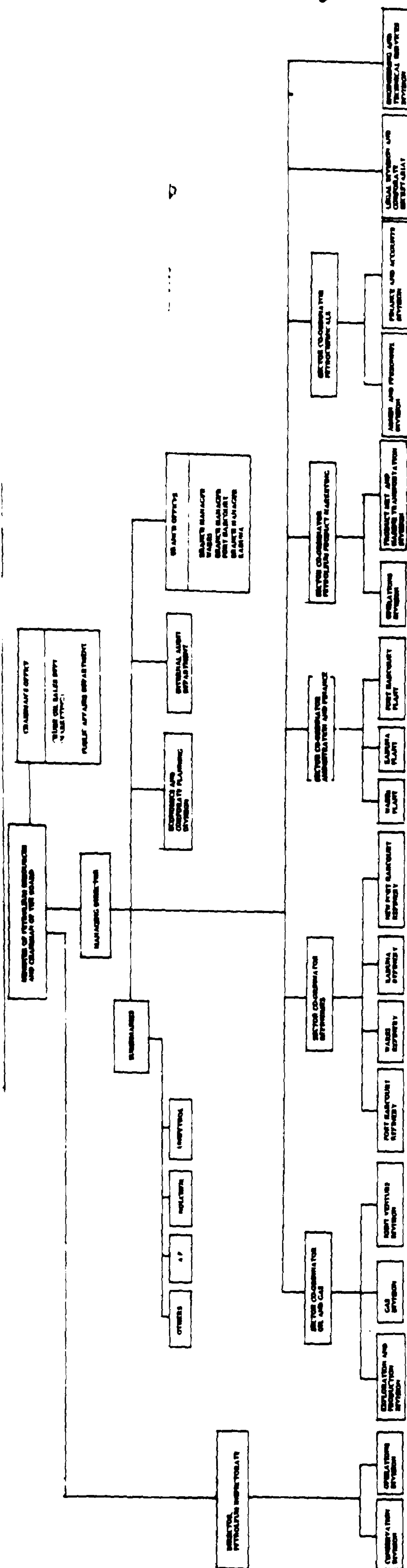
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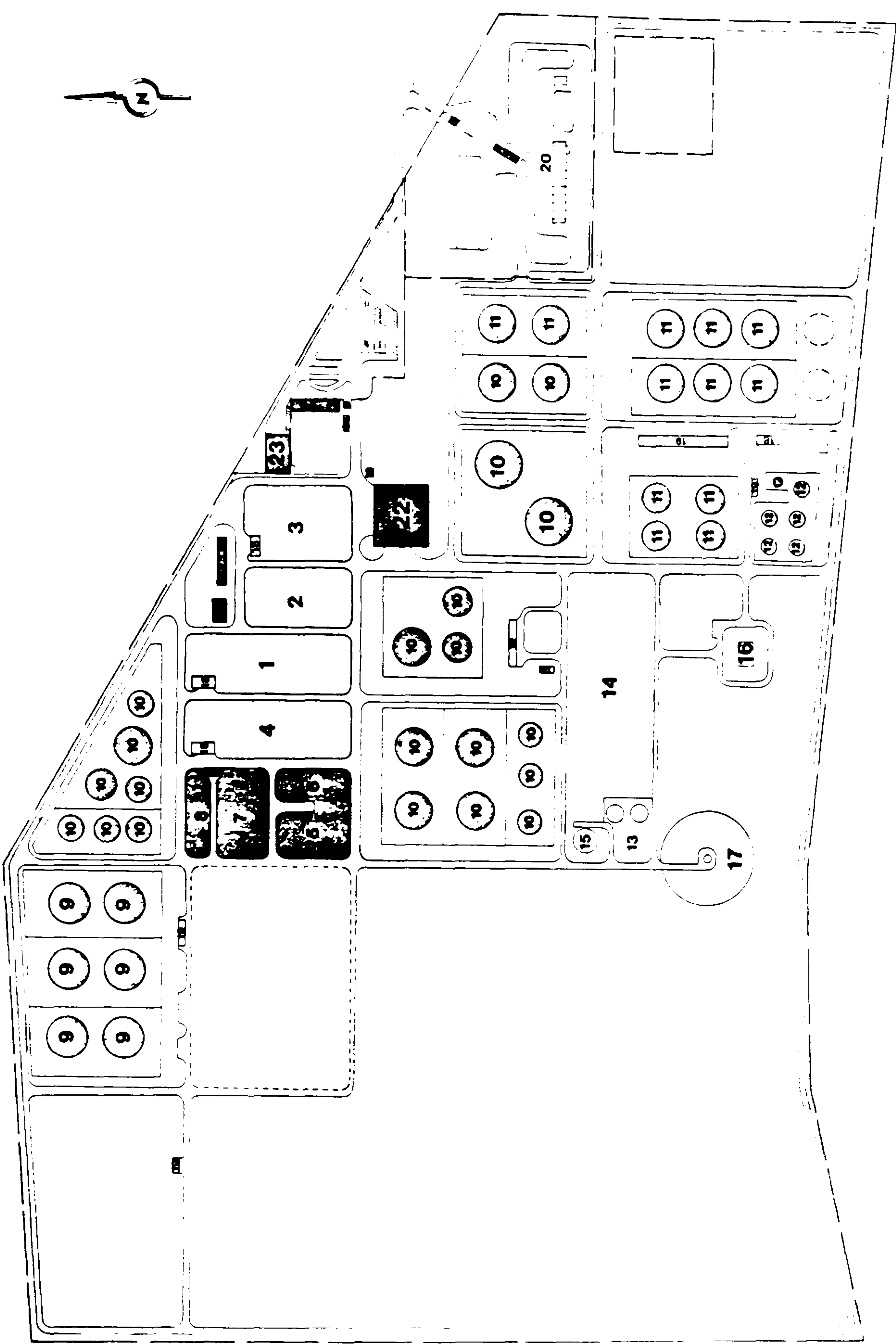
APPENDIX B.

# NNPC OPERATIONAL ORGANOGRAM DECEMBER 1985



# PLOT PLAN

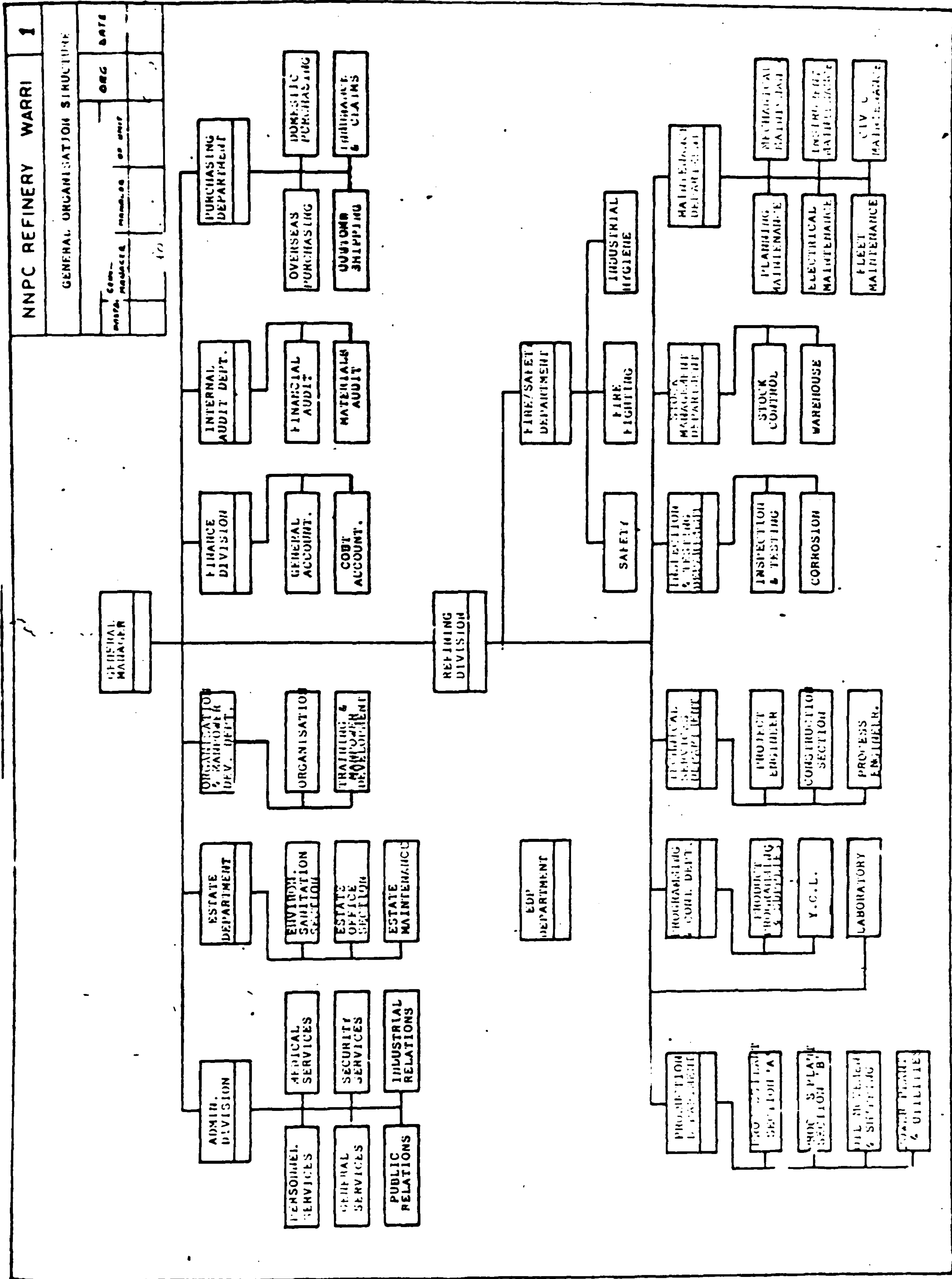
## APPENDIX C.



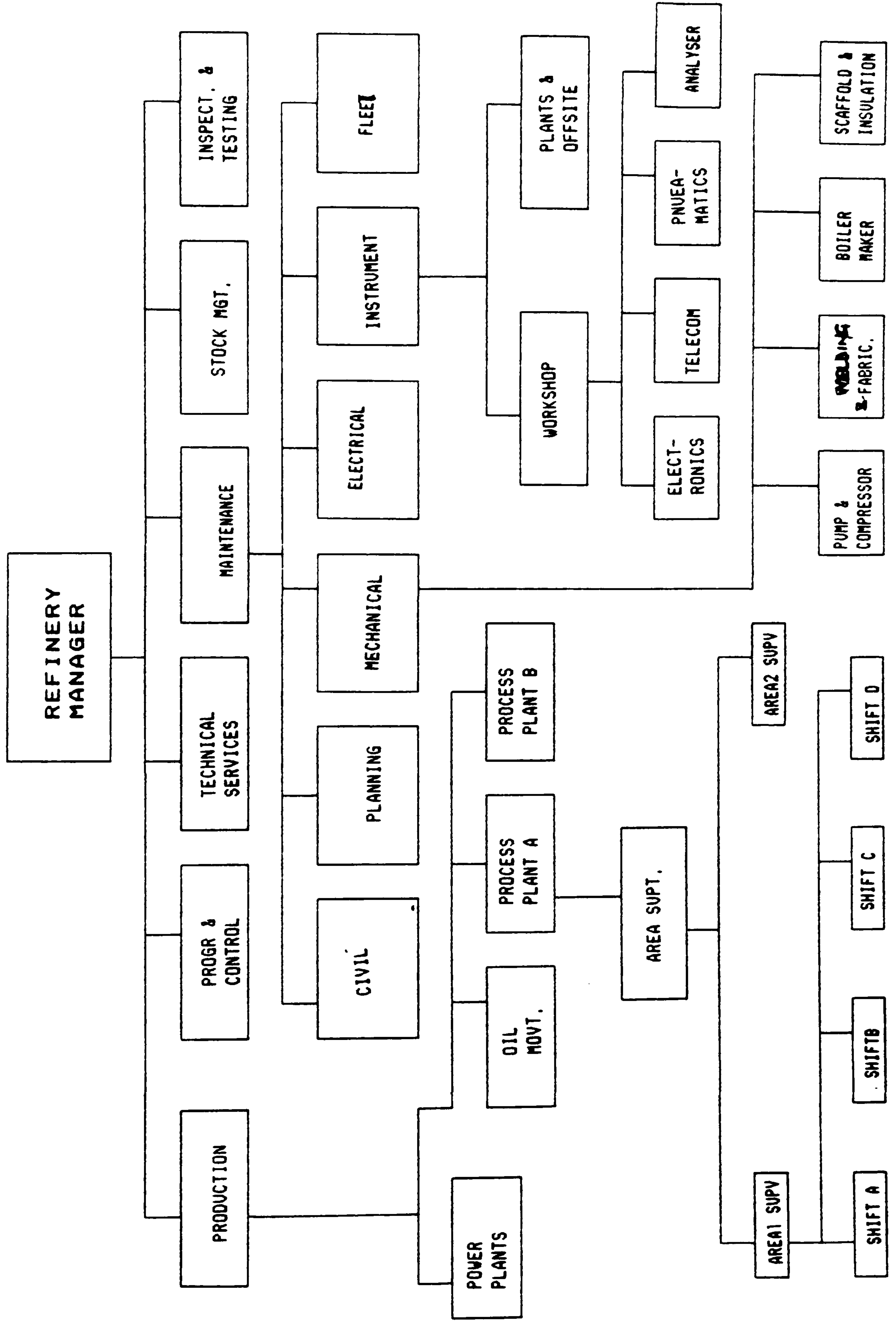
- 1 - Topping, Vacuum and Gas Plant
- 2 - Catalytic Reforming and Naphtha Hydrotreating
- 3 - Kerosene Hydrotreating
- 4 - Fluid Catalytic Cracking, LPG Merox and Gasoline Merox
- 5 - Power Plant
- 6 - Fuel Oil
- 7 - Water Treatment
- 8 - Cooling Towers
- 9 - Crude Tanks
- 10 - Intermediate Product Tanks
- 11 - Final Product Tanks
- 12 - LPG Spheres
- 13 - Ballast Tanks
- 14 - Waste Water Treating Plant
- 15 - Fire Fighting System
- 16 - Fire Fighting Training Area
- 17 - Flare
- 18 - Electrical Substations
- 19 - Pumping Stations
- 20 - Truck Loading
- 21 - Administration Building
- 22 - Workshop and Warehouse
- 23 - Canteen
- 24 - Medical Center
- 25 - Laboratory
- 26 - Main Control Room



APPENDIX D(i).

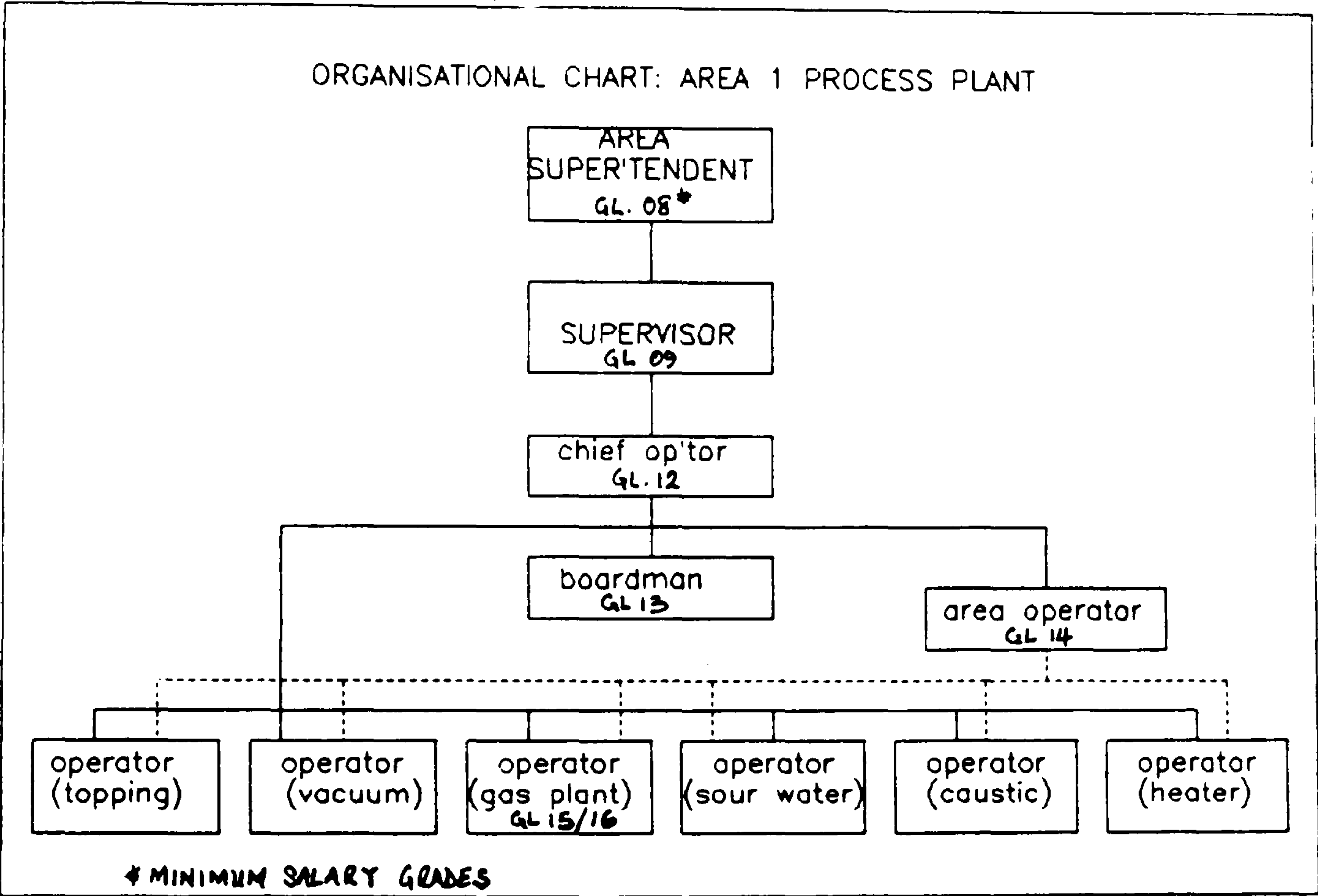


THE REFINERY DIVISION - ORGANISATIONAL CHART -





APPENDIX D(iii).



APPENDIX E(i)

## NIGERIAN NATIONAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION

## PAY STRUCTURE: PRE-APRIL 1980

GL		steps						Incre- ment
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
2	Managing Director	1,667						
3	Sector Coordinator	1,500						
4	General Manager	1,350	1,400					55
5	Manager	1,200	1,242	1,284				42
6	Deputy Manager	1,075	1,112	1,149				37
7	Chief	937	970	1,003	1,036			33
8	Deputy Chief	814	844	874	904			30
9	Asst' Chief	709	734	759	784			25
10	Senior	584	605	626	647	668		21
11	Grade 1	467	486	505	524	543		19
12	Grade 2	350	367	384	401	418		17
13		294	307	320	333	346		13
14		224	234	244	254	264	274	10
15		163	172	181	190	199	208	9
16		117	124	131	138	145	152	7
17		90	94	98	102	106	110	4

APPENDIX E(ii)

## NIGERIAN NATIONAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION

## PAY STRUCTURE: APRIL 1980.

GL	GRADE DESCRIPTION	steps						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
2	Managing Director	1,867.0						
3	Sector Coord'tor	1,683.0						
4	General Manager	1,518.0	1,573.0					55
5	Manager	1,353.0	1,400.0	1,447.0				47
6	Deputy Manager	1,215.5	1,257.5	1,299.5				42
7	Chief	1,065.0	1,101.0	1,137.0	1,173.0			36
8	Deputy Chief	929.0	962.0	995.0	1,028.0			33
9	Asst. Chief	813.0	841.0	869.0	897.0			28
10	Senior	676.0	699.0	722.0	745.0	768.0		23
11	Grade 1	547.0	568.0	589.0	610.0	631.0		21
12	Grade 2	418.0	437.0	456.0	475.0	494.0		19
13		357.0	371.0	385.0	399.0	413.0		14
14		277.0	289.0	301.0	313.0	325.0	337	12
15		212.0	222.0	232.0	242.0	252.0	262	10
16		154.0	163.0	172.0	181.0	190.0	199	9
17		117.0	122.0	127.0	132.0	137.0	142	5

N.B: All figures in naira and on monthly basic pay.



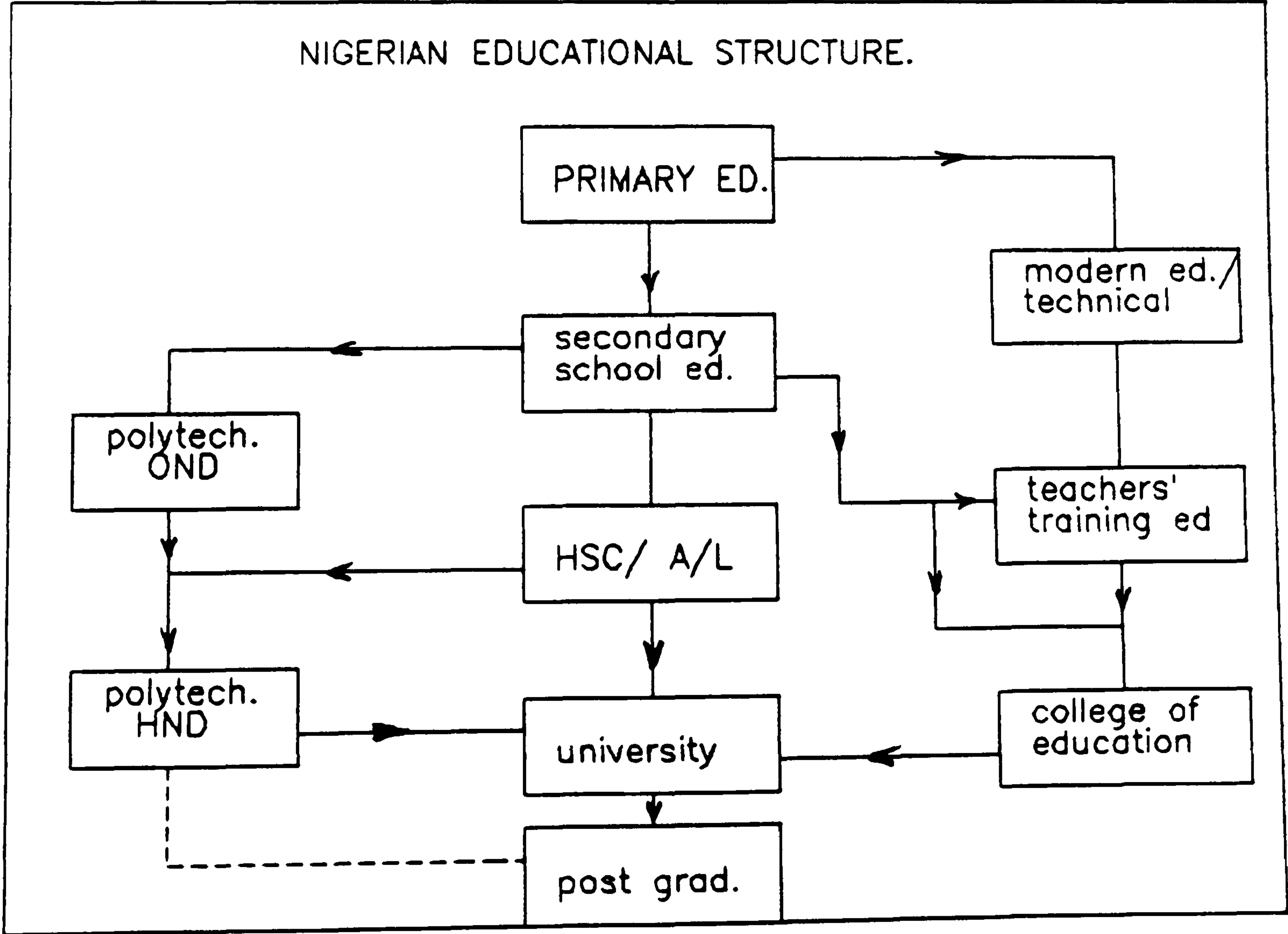
APPENDIX F(i)

CAREER AND PAY STRUCTURE OF NNPC.

GL 2	Managing Director			2
GL 3	Sector Coordinator			3
GL 4	General Manager			4
GL 5	Manager			5
GL 6	Deputy Manager			6
GL 7	Chief			7
GL 8	Deputy Chief	Chief Supervisor		8
GL 9	Assistant Chief	Deputy Chief Superv		9
GL10	Senior Officer	Assistant Chief Sup.		10
GL11	Grade 1 Officer	Senior Supervisor		11
GL12	Grade 2 Officer	Superv Grade 1	Senior Op/Technician	12
GL13		Superv Grade 2	Operator/Technic 1	13
GL14			Operator/Technician 2	14
GL15			Asst Operator/Technician	15
GL16			Trainee Operator/Technician	16
GL17			Cleaner/Driver/Guard etc	17

APPENDIX F(ii)

NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE.



## APPENDIX G.

SHIFT ROSTER 1985

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN'86
a	R	N	M	M	M	R	A	A	A	R	R	N	N
b	N	M	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	N
c	N	M	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	N
d	M	A	R	N	N	M	N	M	M	N	A	M	C
e	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
f	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
g	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
h	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
i	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
j	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
k	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
l	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
m	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
n	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
o	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
p	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
q	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
r	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
s	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
t	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
u	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
v	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
w	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
x	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
y	A	R	N	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C
z	R	N	M	M	M	M	A	A	A	R	R	N	C



## APPENDIX H(i).

# NNPC IS PIONEERING THE DIVERSE TECHNOLOGIES NIGERIA NEEDS FOR THE YEARS AHEAD

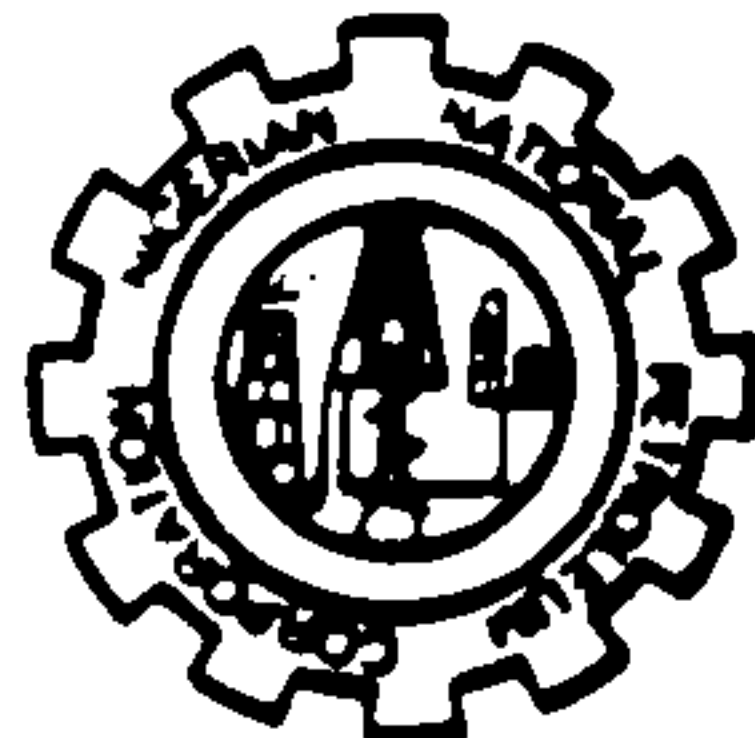
WHEN YOU THINK OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NIGERIA'S INDUSTRIAL TAKE-OFF, THINK OF NNPC.

PETROLEUM AND ITS BY-PRODUCTS: THE VERY BASICS OF INDUSTRY TODAY AND FOR CENTURIES TO COME.

THE RAPID PACE OF MODERNISATION. THE SPECTACULAR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA. THE REQUIREMENTS OF INDUSTRY; OF PLASTIC ENGINEERING, AND AGRICULTURE; OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING, AND THE TYRE INDUSTRY, ETC.

EACH DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF PETROLEUM... AND ITS BY-PRODUCTS. THAT MEANS NNPC.

IT IS NO EXAGGERATION. WE ARE THE PIVOT OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH.



# NNPC

**Pillar of Nigerian Economy**



APPENDIX H(ii).



Over the ages children have dug  
man holes and erected dream castles

## ...NNPC transforms them into reality

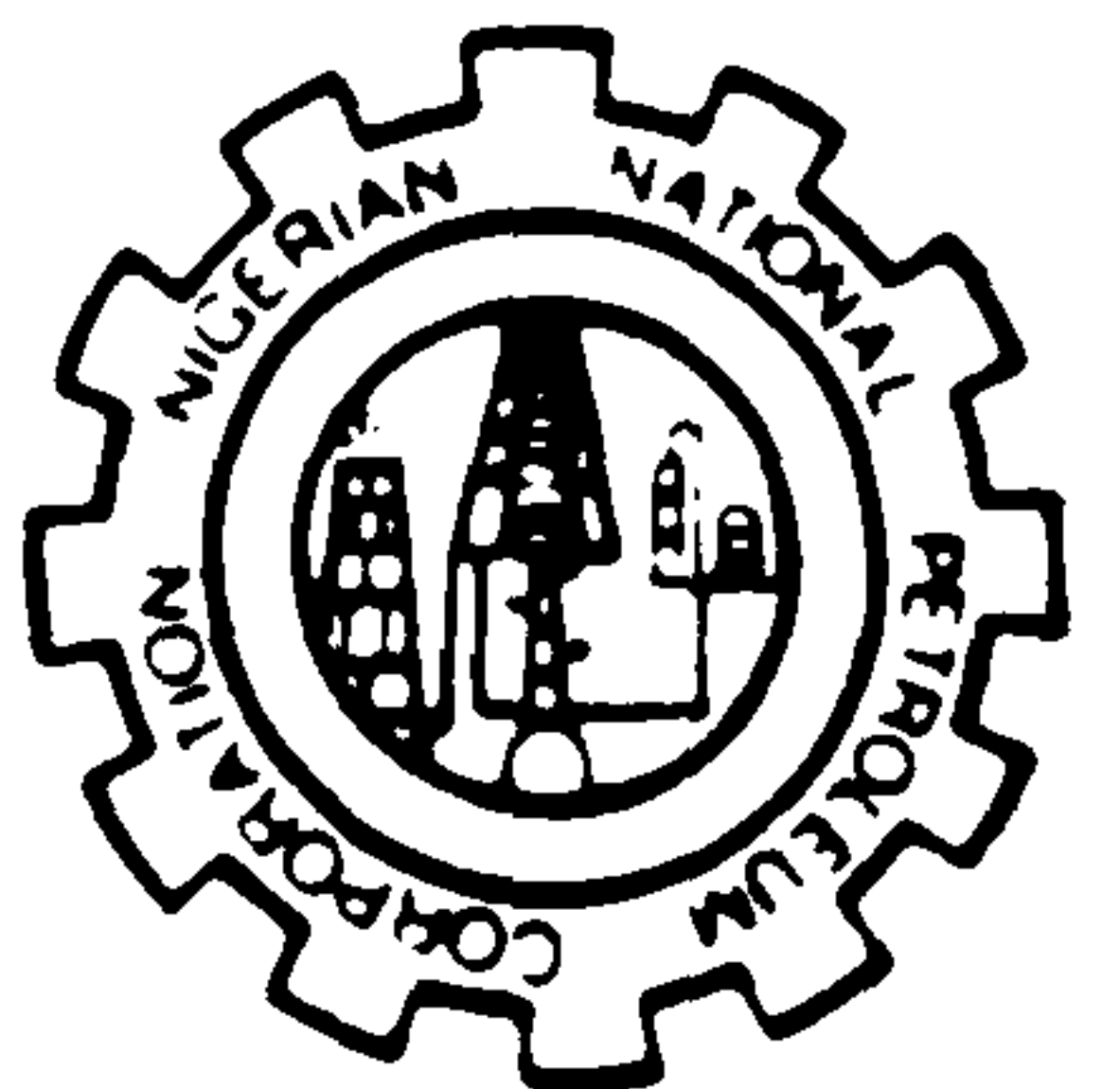
In the last few years NNPC has been occupied with actualizing dreams of yesterday. Look at the sky line now, the state of industry, and the economy and international Balance of trade ...

NNPC's pioneering engineering has transformed even Nigerians murky swamps and sand wastes into gold black gold

No wonder our accolade

**NNPC: Pillar of Nigeria's Economy**

**NIGERIAN  
NATIONAL  
PETROLEUM  
CORPORATION**

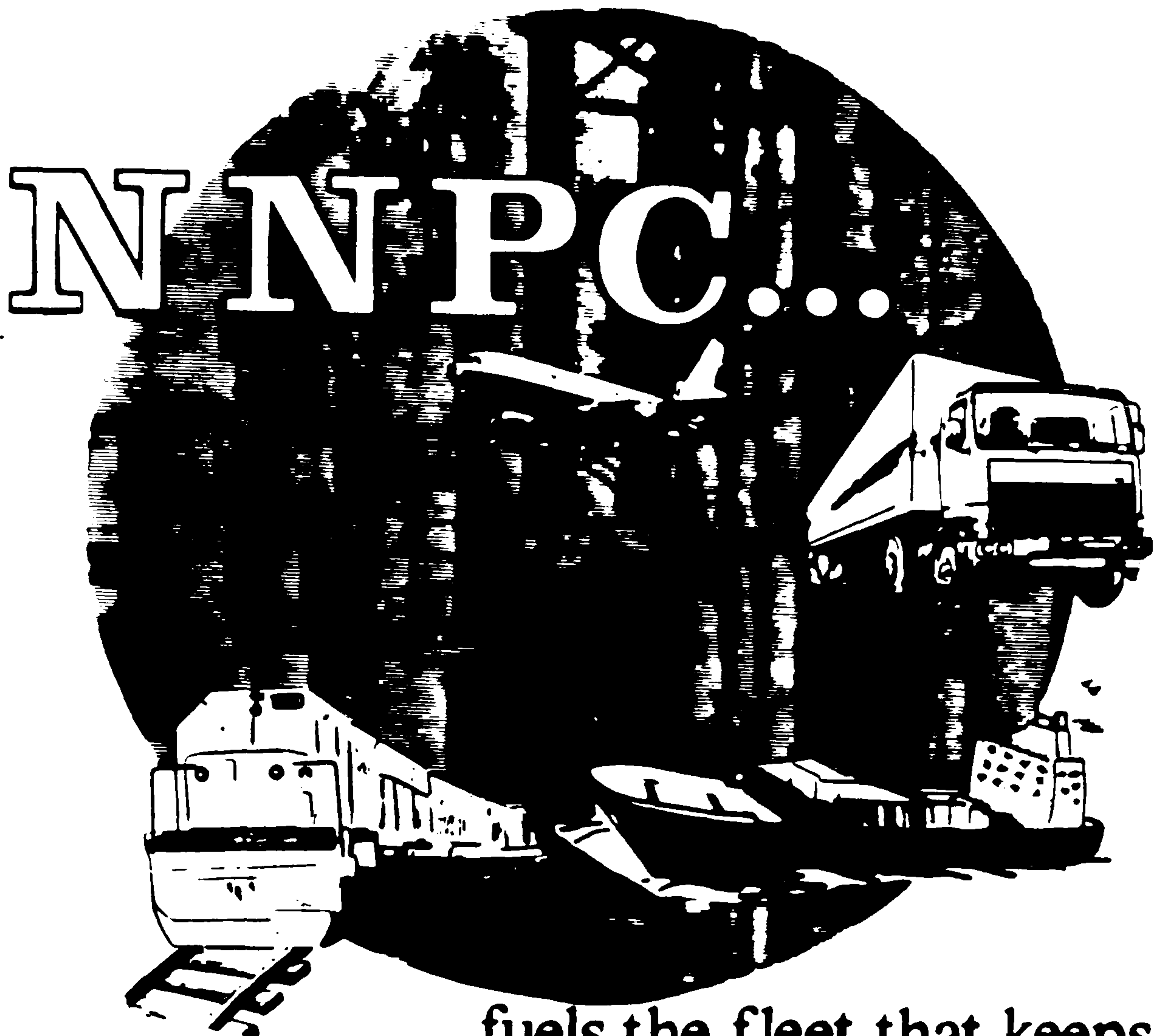


STAMP

**THE EDITOR, NAPETCOR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT  
NNPC  
PMB 12701  
LAGOS**

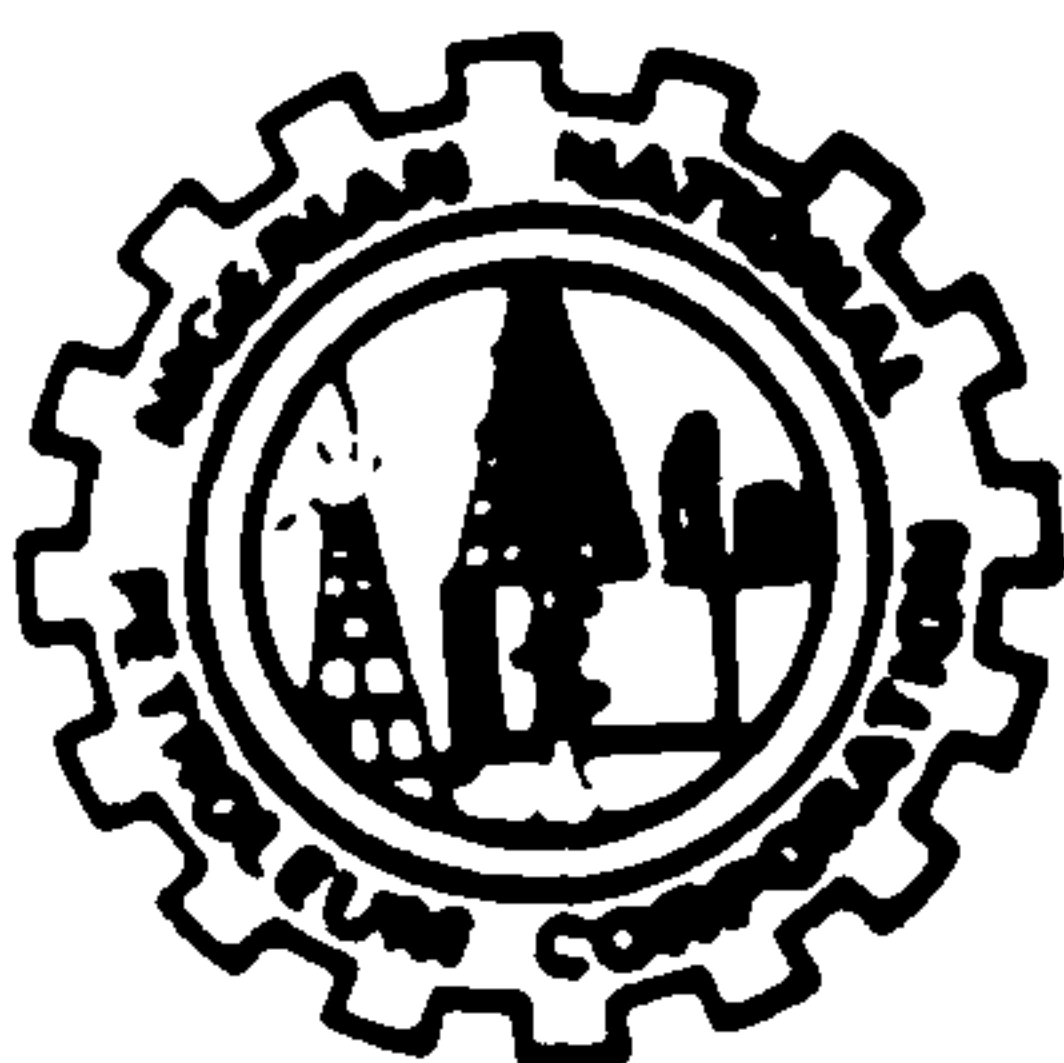
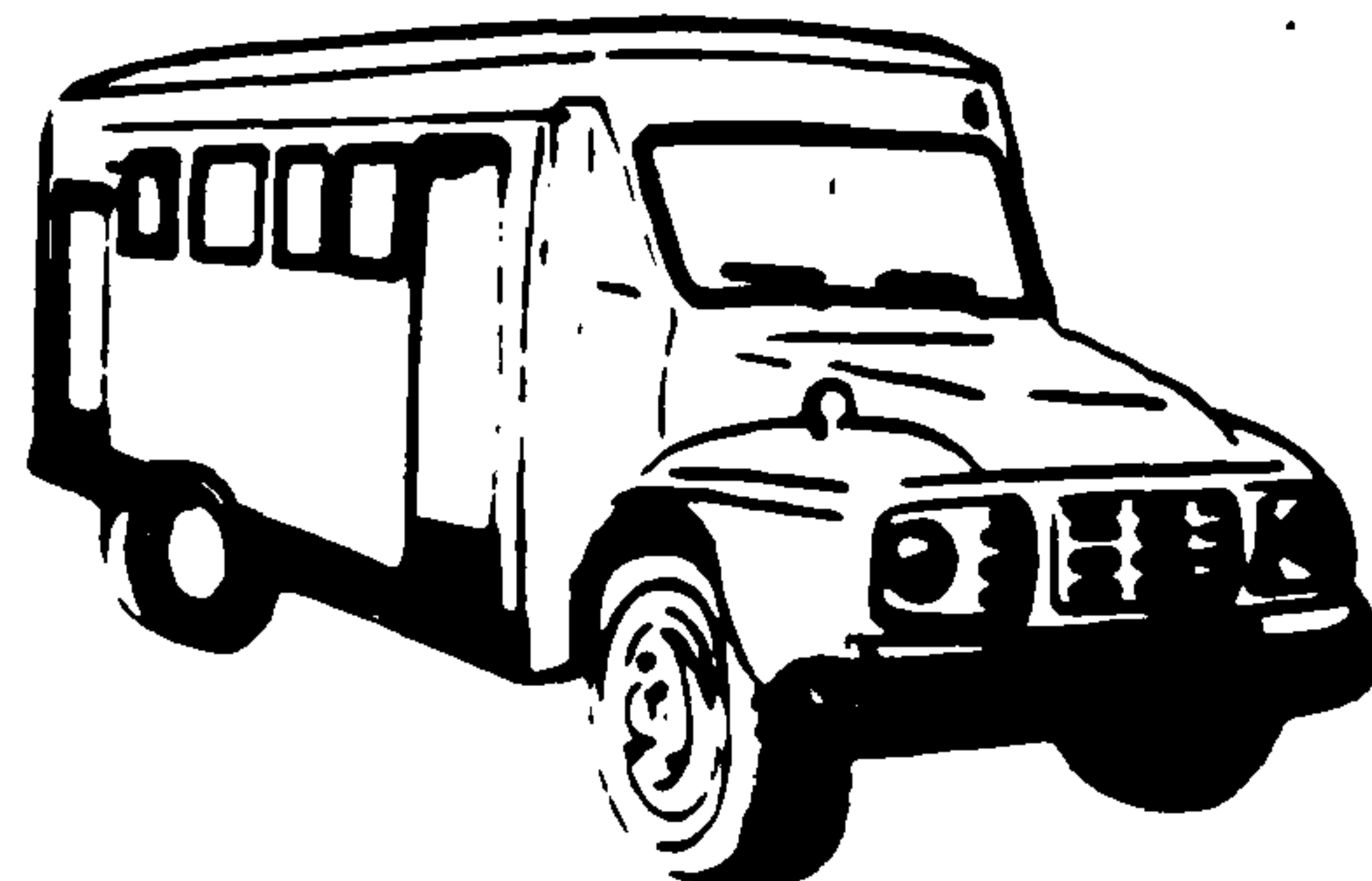
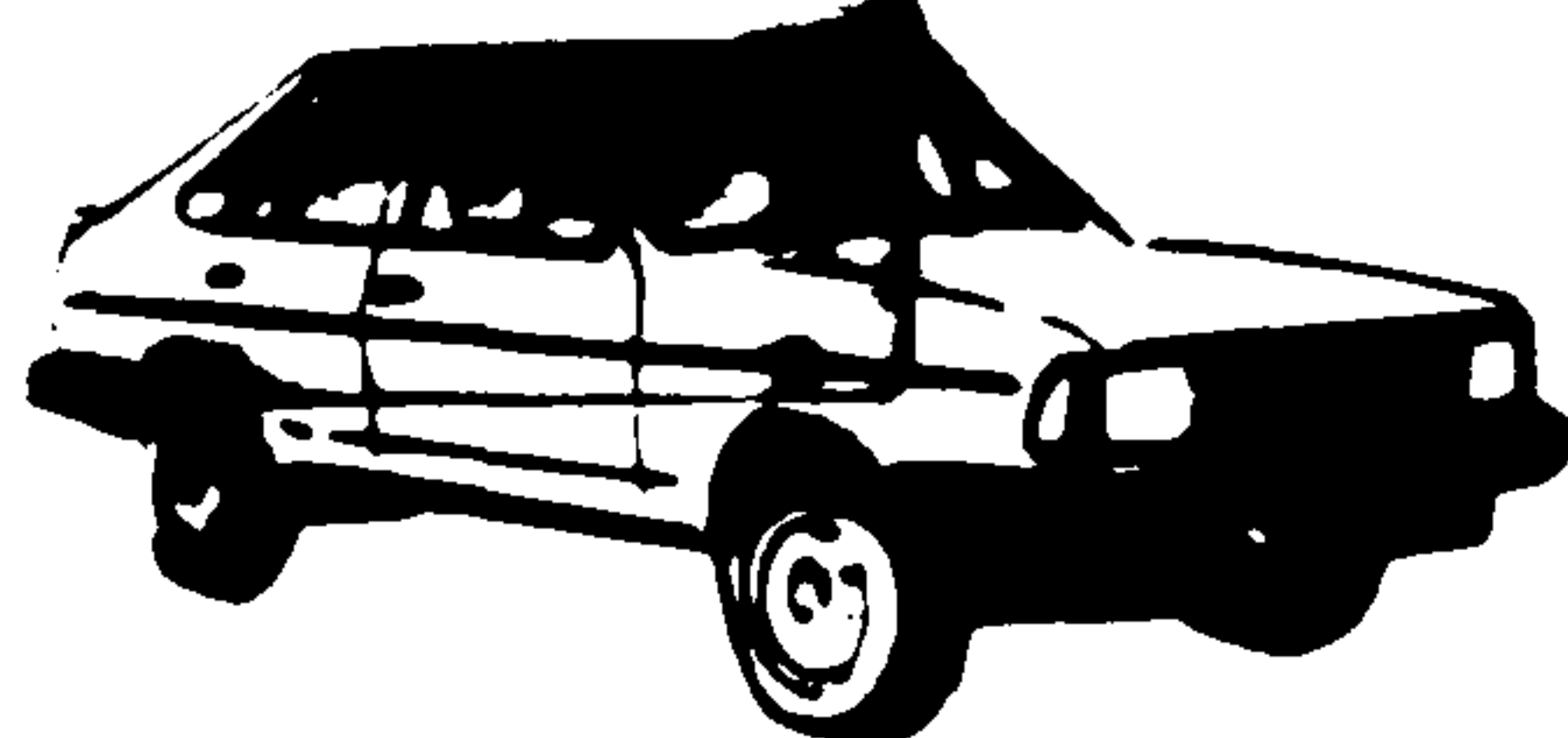


APPENDIX H(iii).



**...fuels the fleet that keeps  
the nation moving.**

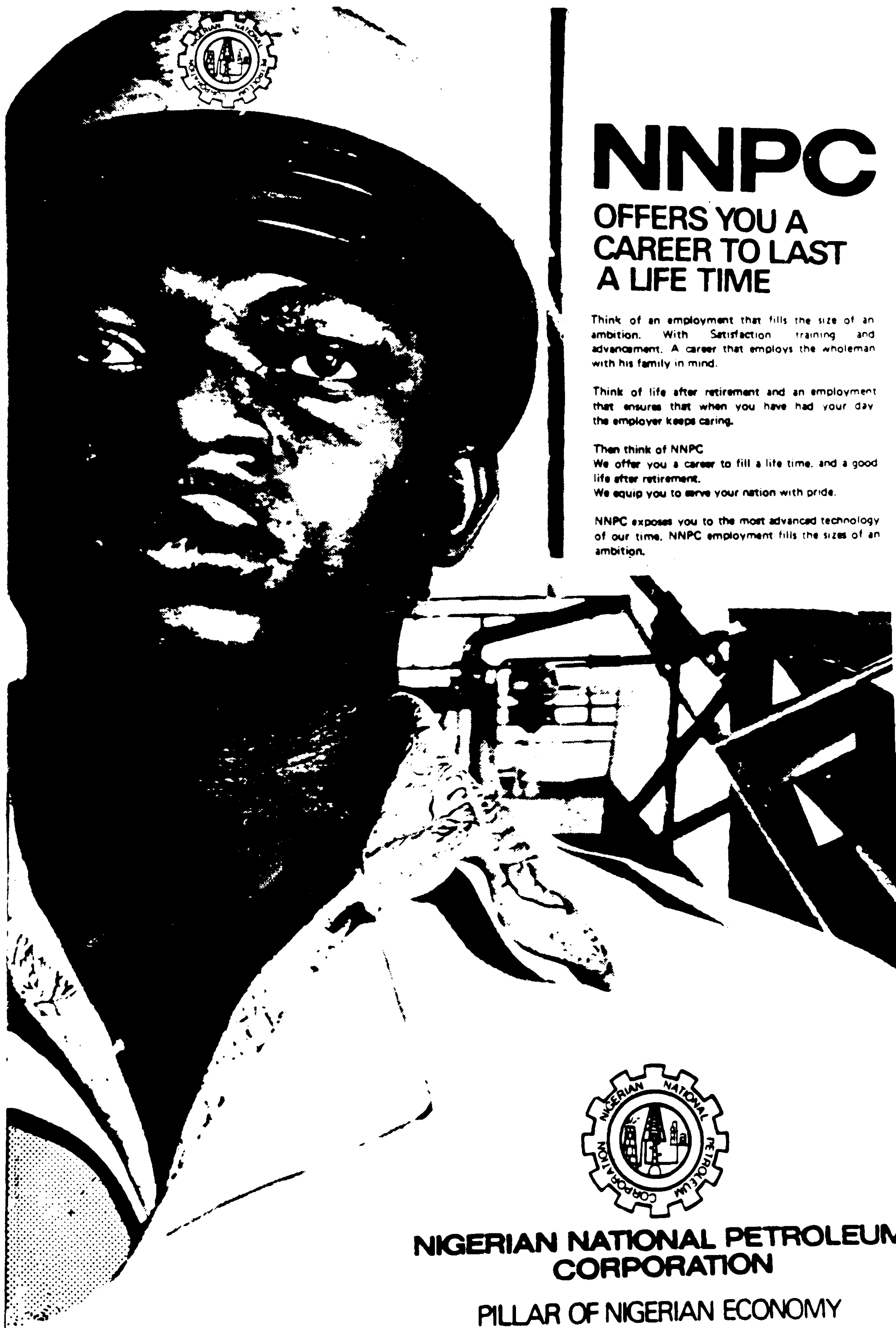
To keep the wheels of the Nation's fleet moving, petroleum products are vital. And that's where NNPC comes in. Mindful of its task, NNPC is always at work. Producing millions of barrels of crude oil. Refining. Storing. And distributing Five Star Gasoline, Supergrade Gasoline, Automotive Gas Oil, Aviation Fuel, etc. all to be consumed by the Nation's fleet: the taxis, molues, danfos, trains, planes, ships, cars and motorcycles. Truly, NNPC is proud of its commitment - to fuel and keep the Nation's fleet moving.



**NIGERIAN NATIONAL  
PETROLEUM CORPORATION**

Falomo Office Complex, P. M. B. 12701, Lagos.

## APPENDIX H(iv)



# NNPC

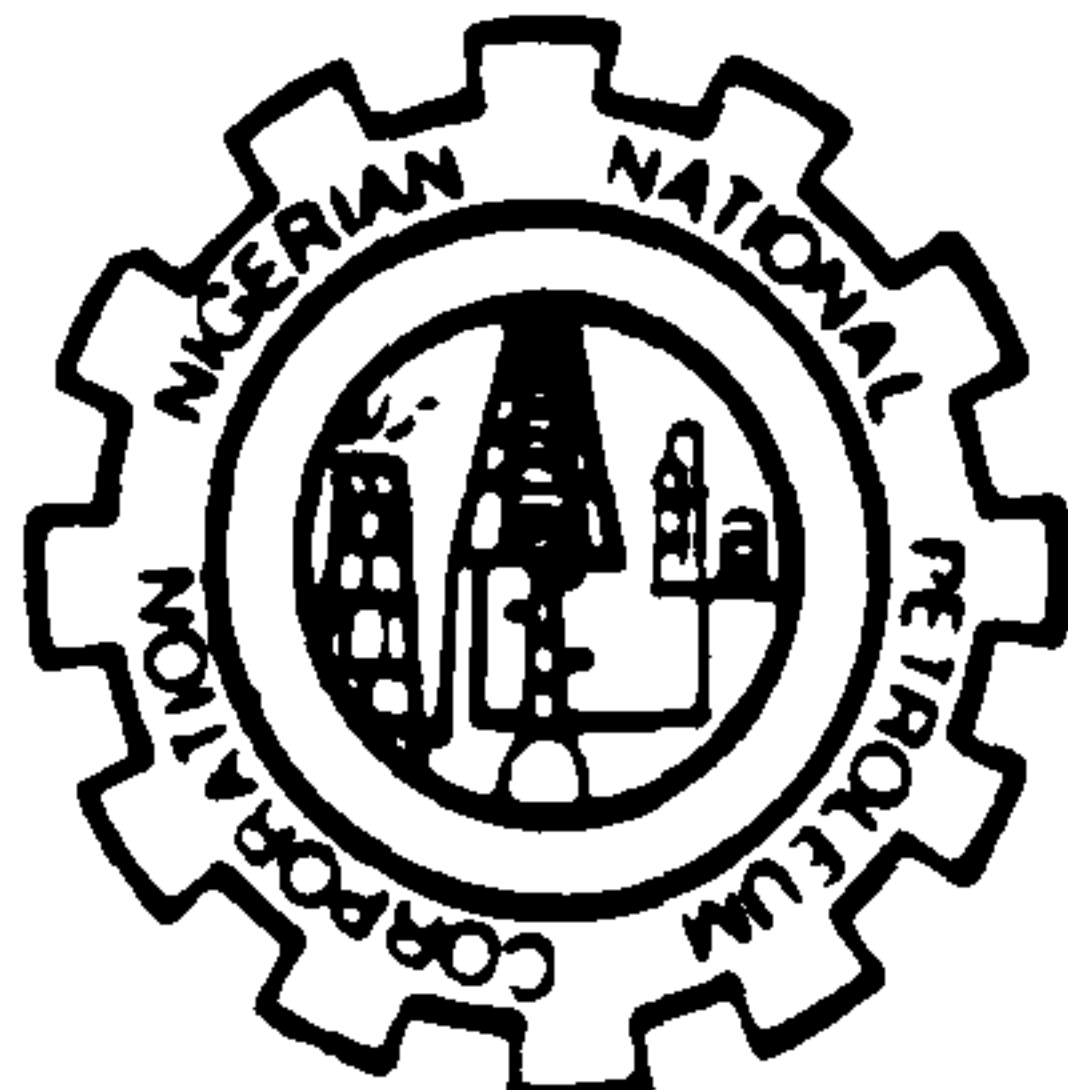
## OFFERS YOU A CAREER TO LAST A LIFE TIME

Think of an employment that fills the size of an ambition. With Satisfaction training and advancement. A career that employs the wholeman with his family in mind.

Think of life after retirement and an employment that ensures that when you have had your day the employer keeps caring.

Then think of NNPC  
We offer you a career to fill a life time, and a good life after retirement.  
We equip you to serve your nation with pride.

NNPC exposes you to the most advanced technology of our time. NNPC employment fills the sizes of an ambition.



### NIGERIAN NATIONAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION

#### PILLAR OF NIGERIAN ECONOMY



<b>N. N. P. G.</b>		<b>MAINTENANCE WORK REQUEST No.</b>				<b>Form No.</b>	<b>53900</b>
REFINERY, WARRI		<input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary	<input type="checkbox"/> Programmed	<input type="checkbox"/> Fixed Time	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency	<input type="checkbox"/> Shut - Down	<b>Date of Issue</b>
<b>WHEN COMPILING THIS FORM USE CAPITAL LETTERS AND PRESS HARD TO OBTAIN SHARP COPIES. THANK - YOU.</b>							
Work Permit Prescribed: <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary <input type="checkbox"/> Special <input type="checkbox"/> Excavation <input type="checkbox"/> Decl. of OP. on Electr. Circ.							
Requesting Unit	Equipment Position Number	Cost Centre	Cost Accounting Requested	Job Number	Maintenance Involved (Mainly)		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Specific		<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical	<input type="checkbox"/> Instruments <input type="checkbox"/> Civil	
Detailed Description of Work				Reasons for the Request			
Execution Time <input type="checkbox"/> Requested <input type="checkbox"/> Suggested		Issuing Officer		Management Approvals			
Start On	Complete Before	Name	Telephones	Signature	Issuing Unit	Maintenance Div.	
Maintenance Notes		Signature :					
<b>ORDINARY WORK PERMIT</b>							
Safety Precautions To be Adopted Before Starting the Work		Product Handled by the Subject Equipment					
De-Energize the Electrical Eqp. : Decl. of op. on Electr. Circuit No.		<input type="checkbox"/> Harmless <input type="checkbox"/> Corrosive <input type="checkbox"/> Toxic <input type="checkbox"/> Flammable					
Safety Measures to be Adopted During the work Execution (Responsibility of Maint. Foreman)							
Authorization to Start the Work		Work <input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> Suspended		Work Completion and Ship - Shaping of Site Accepted			
At	On	Given By	Chief Operator	At	On	By	
Hrs.	Hrs.						

## APPENDIX I(ii).

[illegible]



Code M012-A SHEET 3 OF 4: MAINT. PLANNING

[illegible]



APPENDIX J.

OBITUARY! OBITUARY!! OBITUARY!!!

WITH GRATITUDE TO NNPC FOR A LIFE BADLY SPENT, WE  
ANNOUNCE THE PASSING AWAY OF OUR DEARLY BELOVED  
FATHER, GRANDFATHER, MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER, AND GREAT GRAND  
PARENTS.

MR. OVERTIME

AGE 1981-1985 (4 YEARS)

WHOSE SAD EVENT TOOK PLACE ON 31ST OCT 1985  
AND SURVIVED BY THE FOLLOWING

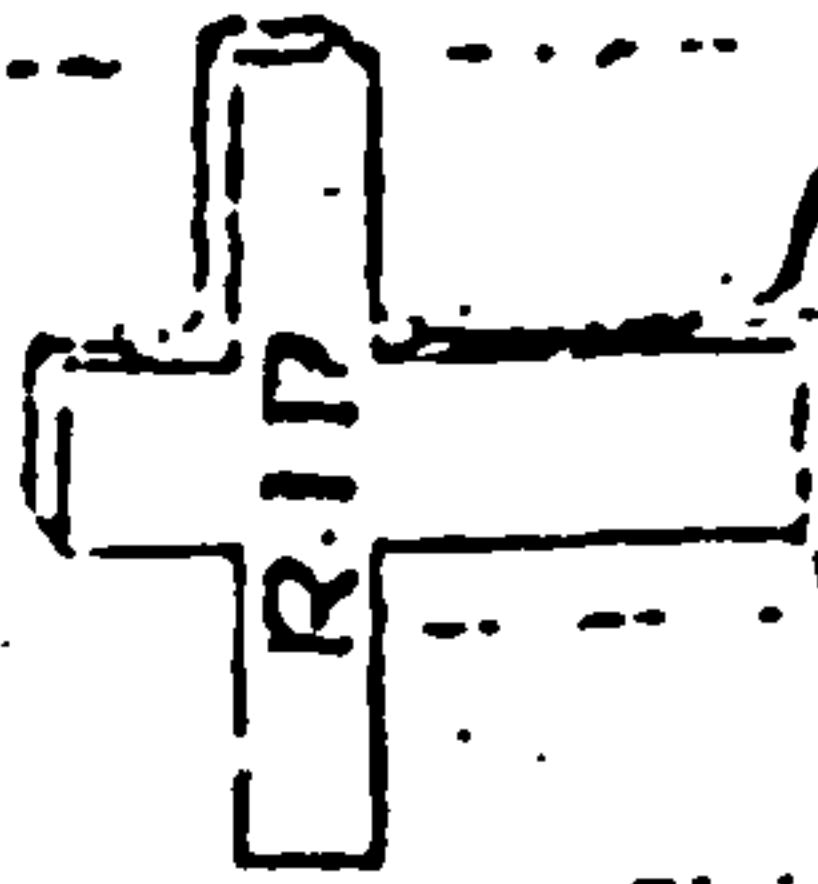
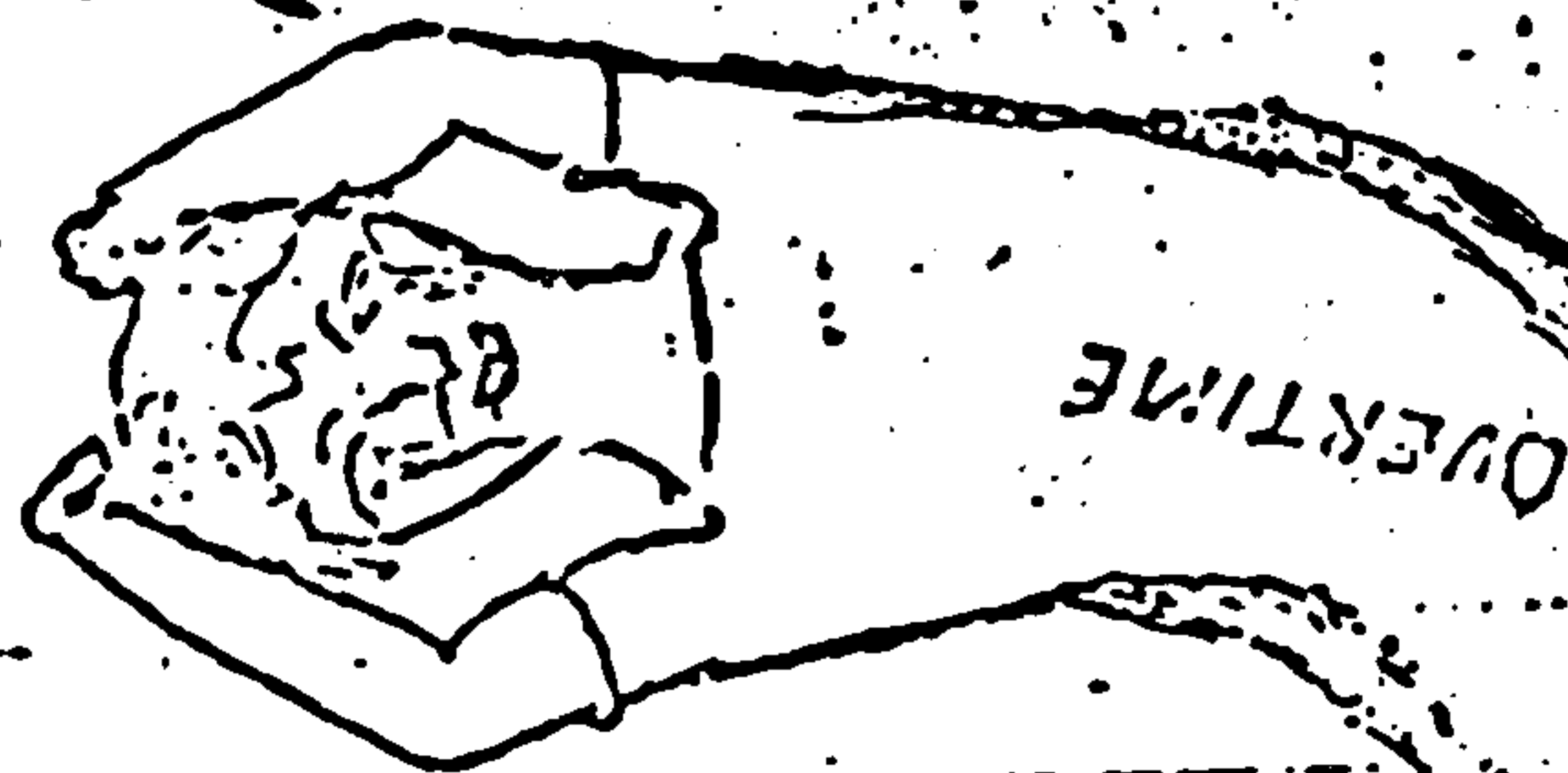
1) FOODSTUFF 1ST SON. (SICK)

2) HOUSE-RENT 1ST DAUGHTER (ON HOSPITAL BED)

3) TAXI 2ND SON (HOMELESS)

AND ALL OTHER SONS AND DAUGHTERS ON EXILE  
BURIAL TAKES PLACE SATURDAYS

SIGNED - BEBEAY  
FOR THE FAMILY



MAOVERTIME  
LLB, PHD,  
BSC, NNPC,  
BA, DSC.  
WARRI.

